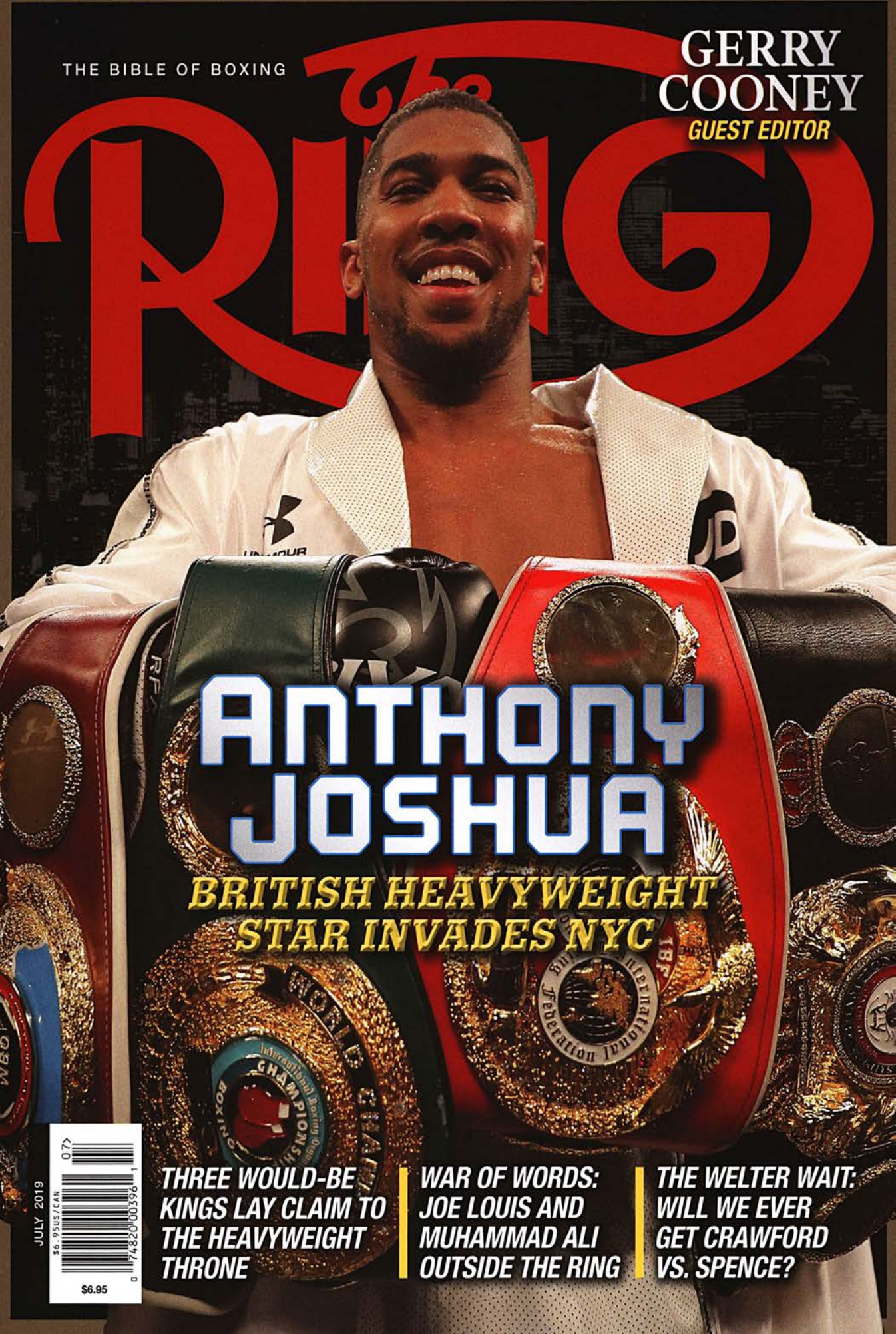
THE BIBLE OF BOXING
The RING
GERRY COONEY
GUEST EDITOR
ANTHONY JOSHUA
BRITISH HEAVYWEIGHT STAR INVADES NYC
THREE WOULD-BE KINGS LAY CLAIM TO THE HEAVYWEIGHT THRONE
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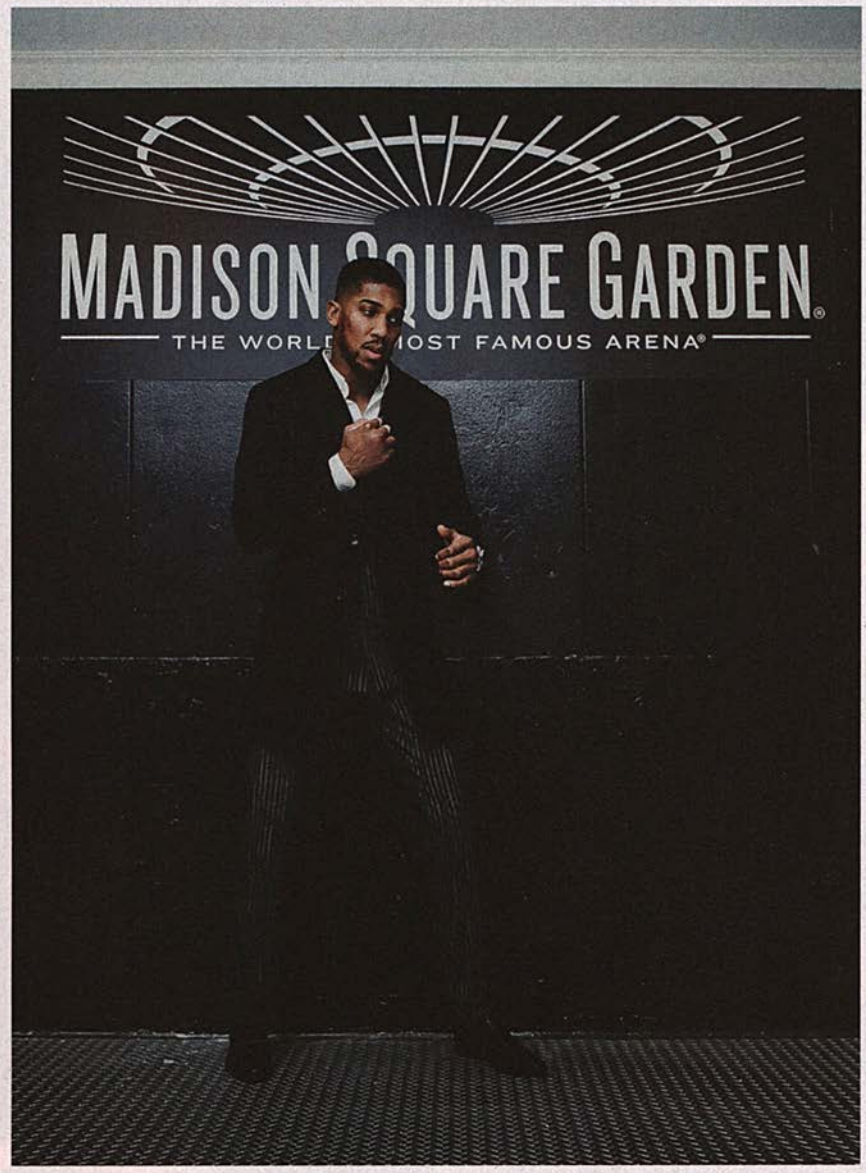

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Anthony Joshua might've lost his original opponent to a PED scandal, but the British heavyweight won't be denied his night at the Garden.

AMANDA WESTCOTT

OPENING SHOT

Christina Hammer talked a good game going into her April 13 showdown with Claressa Shields – enough to capture the attention of die-hard male fans who normally ignore women's boxing – but after the opening round of the Showtime-televised middleweight title-unification bout in Atlantic City, it was clear who the real champion was. Shields landed the harder punches (like this left hand) throughout the 10-rounder and cruised to a dominant decision.

PHOTO BY MITCHELL LEFF

GARY WHO?

Gary Russell Jr. has become completely irrelevant despite never having lost or really come close since he won the title from Jhonny Gonzalez. Has another world champion in history fought once a year for that many years in a row? Other than Irene Pacheco a decade or so ago, I can't think of anyone who even comes close to this level of inactivity with no real good explanation.

Chris Strait

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Pacheco, who lost the IBF flyweight title to Vic Darchinyan in 2004, was indeed an inactive beltholder during his five-year reign, but he did defend the title twice in 2000 (vs. Pedro Pena and Masibulele Makepula). Russell has fought once a year since winning the WBC featherweight title from Gonzalez in 2015. This kind of inactivity among major beltholders is not unheard of in this era (WBA welterweight titleholder Keith Thurman is on a similar pace), but in the previous decades, champions generally didn't slow down to a once-a-year schedule until they were late into their careers and past their primes, such as Marvin Hagler from 1985-1987 or Lennox Lewis in 2002 and 2003. After unifying three major junior welterweight titles in 2001, Kostya Tszyu slowed down to a once-a-year schedule from 2002 until 2005, when Ricky Hatton dethroned the then-35-year-old veteran. Fun fact regarding Russell: When (if) he faces Kiko Martinez on May 18, he will have avoided The Ring ratings' one-year elimination deadline by one day for the second year in a row.

THREE'S A CROWD, BUT FIVE IS BETTER

To help lower the number of really bad decisions that occur way too frequently, in the amateurs when bouts have higher stakes – such as state championships, regional and national tournaments or international bouts – five judges are used. I think it's time for the pros to go to the same system. If any bout is 10 or 12 rounds, it will be mandated that there are five judges instead of three. No, this will not completely eliminate some of the awful decisions that we have been witness to, but it will certainly help to keep the judges more "honest" and hopefully help the fighters in getting decisions that they deserve. Another thing is that in the amateurs when a judge is not doing so well in his scoring and his/her card is way off from the other judges, they will immediately pull that judge and require them to obtain more training. I think this is something that the pros need to do also. Having boxed as an amateur for several years, I have been on the wrong side of more than a few poor decisions, and I know the anguish and frustration that a fighter feels when they have been clearly robbed. Boxing deserves better than this, and so do the boxers and the fans!

David Walrod
Missoula, Montana

BATTLE ROYALE

Don't you think it is time for the heavyweight division to stage a unification tournament between the titleholders and leading contenders, like the series created by legendary promoter Don King and the late promoter Butch Lewis? The heavyweight division is in a crisis at the moment with too many pretenders to the titles. Here in the United Kingdom we have Tyson Fury, who is hardly entertaining, and you have Deontay Wilder, who avoids all the big fights to fight nobodies to boost his unbeaten record. The only real heavyweight champion is Anthony Joshua, whom nobody wants to fight.

Lennox Lewis, when he was undisputed champion, found it hard to find opponents, as he was so good nobody wanted to fight him. He avenged losses from Oliver McCall and Hasim Rahman. At the end of his career, he scored a great victory over Vitali Klitschko when he was up-and-coming. We have to remember Lennox also destroyed a still-capable Mike Tyson. If Lennox were heavyweight champion now, he would have destroyed Tyson Fury, probably pulled off a points decision against Anthony Joshua, and would have destroyed Deontay Wilder.

Ian Owen
Wallington, Surrey, U.K.

A LITTLE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

On page 24 of your April 2019 issue, Ron Borges writes that The Ring "only" recognizes the WBC, WBA, IBF and WBO. That's ridiculous! Let me get this straight. You recognize your own champs as well as the champs of several organizations. You used to be part of the solution. Now you're part of the problem.

Allen Morris

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: We're not ducking your point, but the reality is that the sanctioning bodies are so ingrained in the fabric of the sport now that if we really want to do more than just protest, then it's more complicated than shunning them for their money-grabbing model. Witness, for instance, the importance the fighters themselves place on wearing the now-iconic "green and gold" of the WBC belt. If they own it (or the IBF, WBA or WBO titles), they see themselves as world champions. Of course promoters love the multiple organizations, because titles look good on a billboard. People like you who have been around the sport know the significance of the Ring championship, and we're working hard to get it back into boxing's collective consciousness. It's a process. One thing we try to do in our stories is to differentiate between "champions" and "titleholders," though the terms are somewhat interchangeable. We do make concessions for the sake of subject matter (such as last month's "Champions Corner" feature), colloquial use or just to avoid repetition.

TWEET OF THE MONTH

WRITE TO THE RING!
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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

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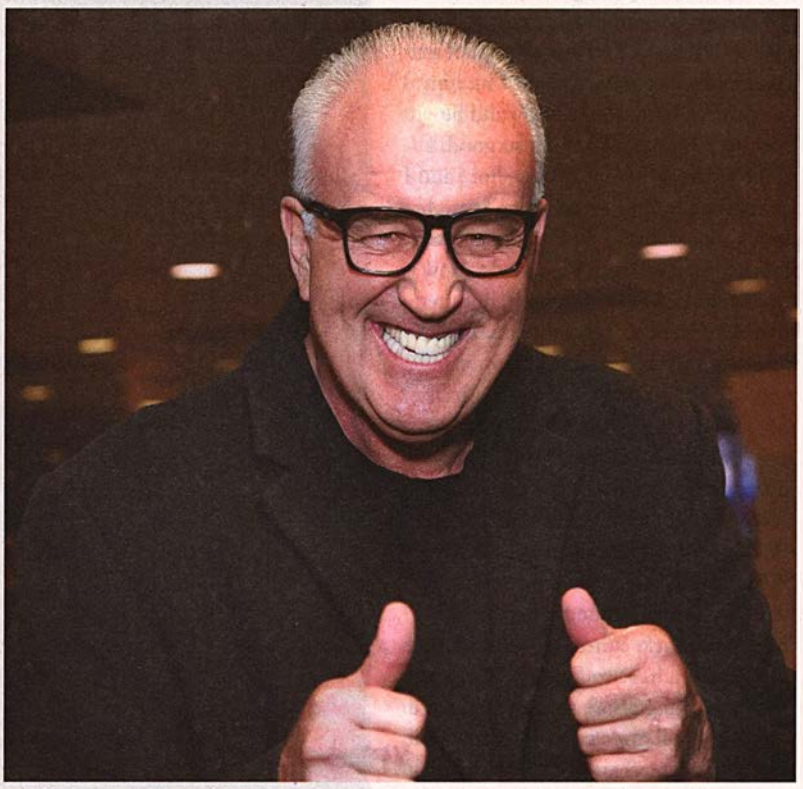
RINGSIDE BY GERRY COONEY

A HARD ROAD WITH A HAPPY ENDING



Gerry Cooney is happy and healthy in his retirement from boxing having learned many life lessons from his turbulent career.

Turning professional was the greatest experience for me, because Olympic gold medalist Howard Davis was given a great contract by CBS and I got to fight on his undercard. I went to Kentucky, I fought in Vegas – all these places I would never get a chance to fight in. Coming up like that was fun; I was a big puncher, I was training hard and life was sweet. I was in Long Island, my hometown, big Irish community, and I was friends with everybody.

When the fame side of things came around, I didn't really allow myself to feel anything. I grew up in a very tough family system; my father was an alcoholic and he taught us a lot of negative stuff. When you grow up in a family like that, you're afraid to feel good because you think good feelings will be taken away from you. But I had a bunch of friends who I grew up with, who traveled with me, and we made the best of it. In life, it takes time to get through certain things; my father was very angry, very physical, and I didn't really believe in myself in the beginning.

Over time, I began to develop in the ring. To be a world-class fighter, there's this split-second timing where you can create the shot, you can create the opening, and that's exciting for an athlete. It's like with

a running back; he can make the move to get inside and get through. For a fighter, you create that opening and you take the power away from the other guy.

When I fought Ken Norton, I thought I was in for a tough fight, but I hit him with a right hand to the body and he buckled a little bit. That felt so good. I said to myself, 'Let me take a shot,' and I spun him into the corner. Once I caught up with his bobbing and weaving, I just knocked him dead in 54 seconds. Now I'd always looked after myself, but the night I knocked out Norton, it was like a light went on. I went on this wild run – drinking regularly. Looking back, that's where I believe my career ended; I started to drink and party, and that was my downfall.

When Larry Holmes dropped me in the second round, I remember thinking, 'What the hell are you doing down here?' I got up and fought harder to get the respect back. When you get hurt like that, you have to fight back to get respect. Talking about this fight all these years later still gives me chills, because it was such a great experience. I look back on how I grew up compared to how far I got. I wasn't supposed to get that far, and I had to find my own way. I had so much going on in my life; I was fixing everyone's problems, looking after my family – it all added up.

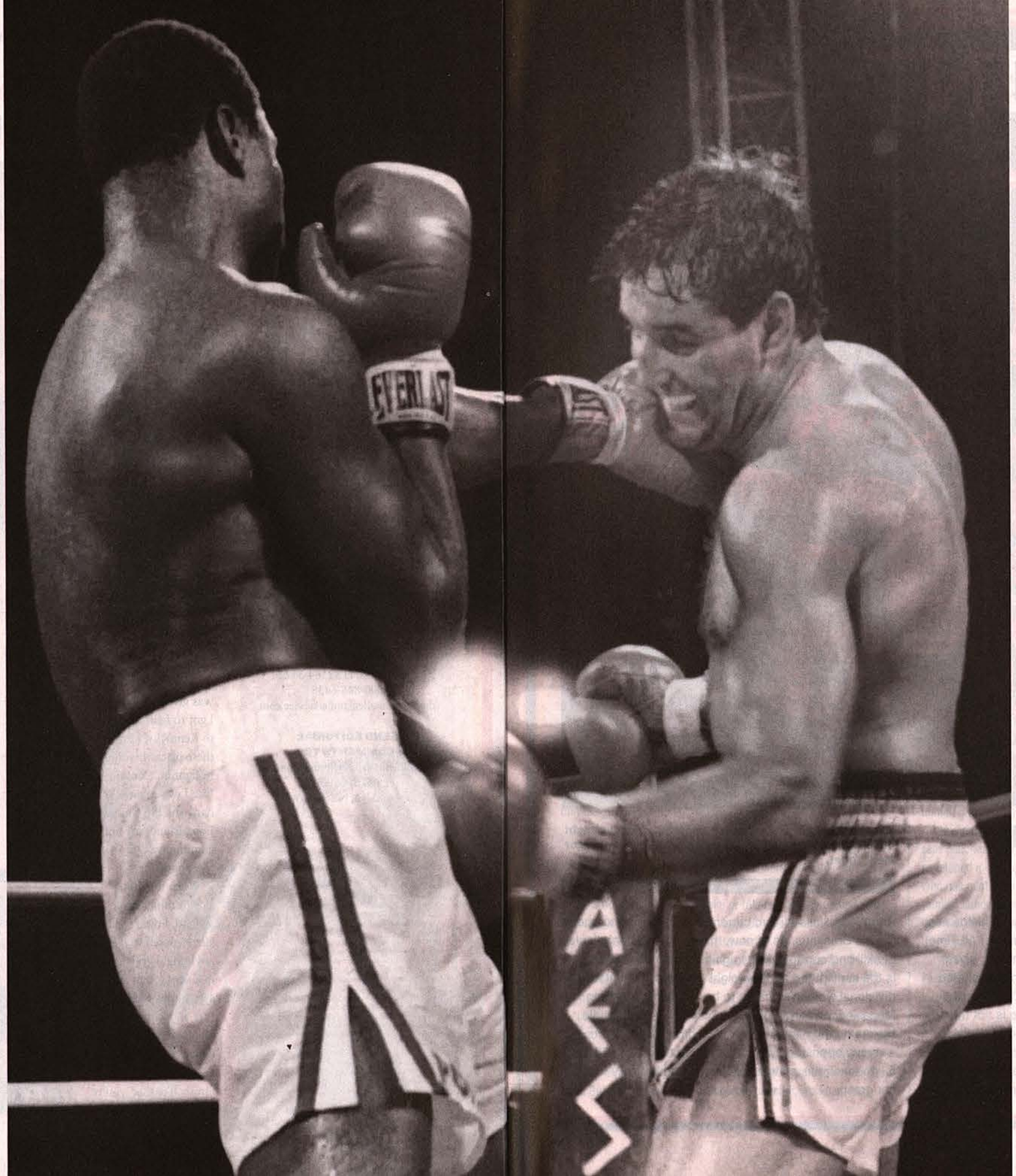
I still had a great fight with Holmes, but I'd had a torn rotator cuff and, quite frankly, he was a great champion. Despite all my shit, Holmes was great; he was the best, top five in heavyweight history. He was very smart in the ring and, being honest, I needed four or five more tough fights to be ready for him. I needed someone to grab me by the arm, someone to look after me, and I never got that.

There was bad blood in the buildup, but on the night of our fight, when (referee) Mills Lane gave us the instructions, Holmes looked at me and said, 'Let's have a good fight!' And we did. There was no point getting angry during the buildup, because I was living the dream; I was fighting for the heavyweight championship of the world. There was a lot of nasty stuff surrounding our fight – the Ku Klux Klan and real hatred – but Don King was creating a lot of that to make money. It got ugly.

I recognize now that I was very tough on myself when I lost to Holmes, and it was almost like I sabotaged myself. When you grow up in a dysfunctional family, it's like you're always looking to mess things up because you don't believe you deserve the good things. I threw it away, but I also saved my life. Had I won that fight with Holmes, I'd be dead now, because I was living life in the fast lane.

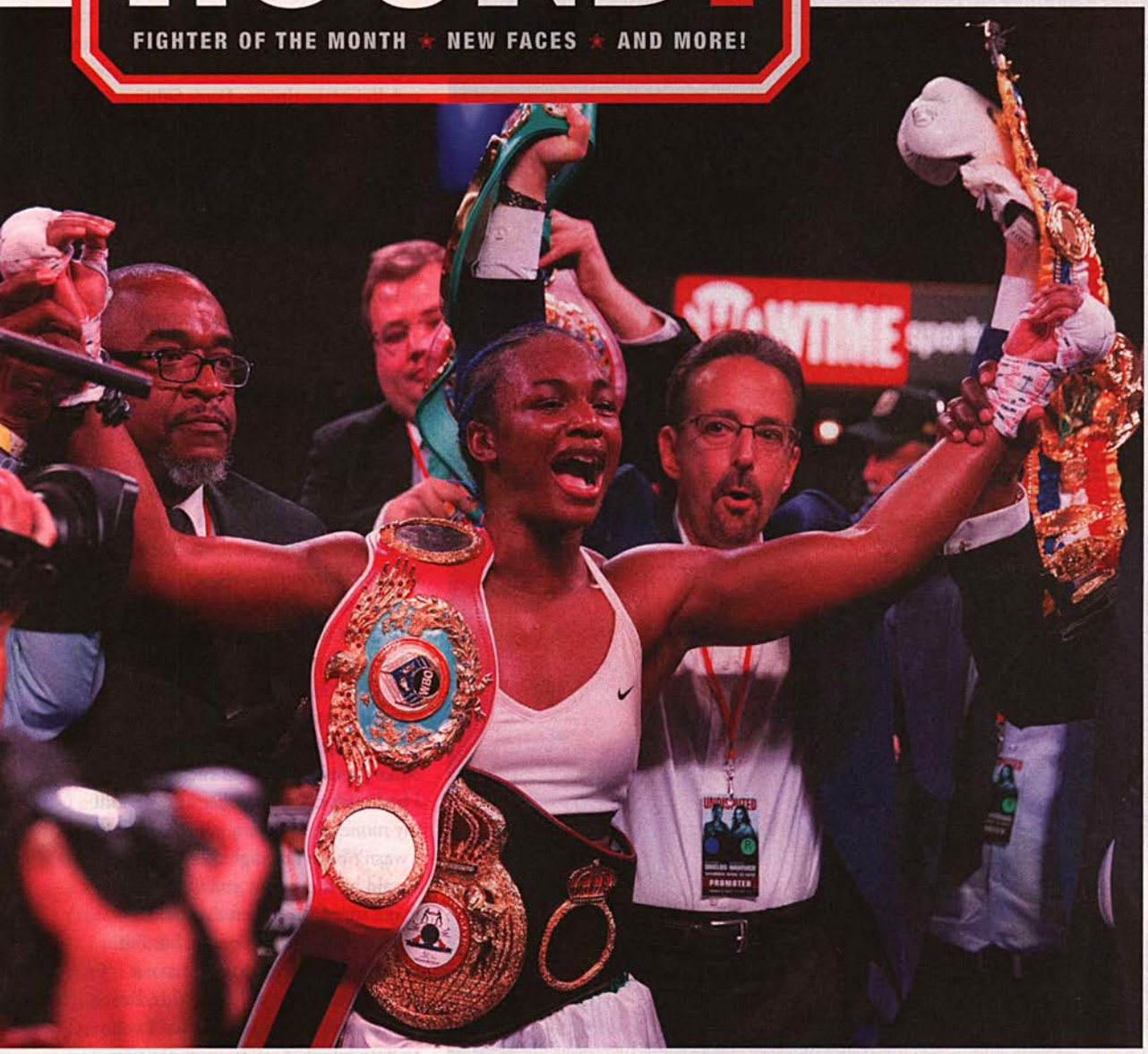
But I've made peace with what I did in my career. I went very far with what I was given. Do I wish I went all the way? Yes, I do. But the important thing is I saved my money. I had these two managers (Dennis Rappaport and Mike Jones) who hated each other, so I had one watch the other and kept all my money. I was born at nighttime, but I wasn't born last night. I knew there would be rainy days and I wanted to make sure I was taken care of.

I was away from boxing, but I'm training fighters now and I have a passion for it again. I train kids, I've started training some pros and I want to pass on what my trainers gave me. So many of the great trainers have died; they're not here anymore. Boxing is almost watered down compared to how it used to be. I had good teachers; Gil Clancy was great, and Victor Valle, my trainer for most of my career, was such a great teacher. Now I'm teaching kids how to box correctly. It's all great, and things worked out for me.



Cooney wasn't at his best, physically or mentally, for his challenge of heavyweight champ Larry Holmes, but he's proud of his effort against the all-time great.

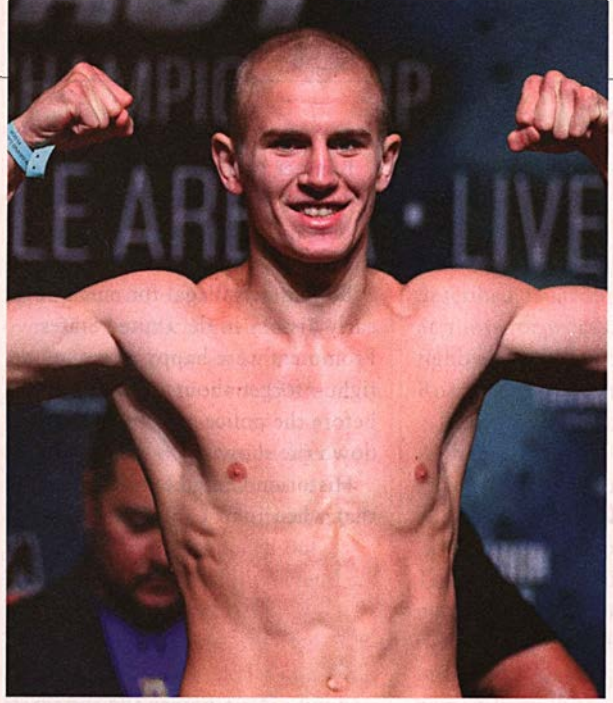
Gerry Cooney is a former two-time heavyweight championship challenger. A new biography – Gentleman Gerry: A Contender in the Ring, a Champion in Recovery – *is scheduled for release in June.*



CLARESSA SHIELDS

Claressa Shields celebrates holding all four middleweight titles, plus the coveted Ring Magazine belt, with manager Mark Taffet.

From the moment she turned pro, Claressa Shields has claimed to be the GWOAT (Greatest Woman of All Time) of boxing. Her hubris can be pardoned in part, given her stellar amateur accomplishments, which included two Olympic gold medals en route to a 77-1 record. However, the 24-year-old Michigan native is not the GWOAT. Not yet. But her dominant 10-round decision over previously unbeaten Christina Hammer on April 13 in Atlantic City put her in the conversation with the likes of Christy Martin, Lucia Rijker, Regina Halmich, Ann Wolfe, Laila Ali and current pound-for-pound queen Cecilia Braekhus. As of now, thanks to a brilliant display of skill and controlled fury against Hammer, Shields is the undisputed middleweight champion, the first divisional women's champ to be recognized by Ring Magazine, and arguably one of the three best female boxers on the planet. It only took her nine pro fights – versus opposition with a combined record of 108-13-5 – to reach this plateau. History is undoubtedly within her grasp.



Bohachuk has a relentless work ethic and fighting mentality that fits right in at trainer Abel Sanchez's renowned Summit Gym in Big Bear, California.

NEW FACES

SERHII BOHACHUK

By **Anson Wainwright**

Junior middleweight puncher Serhii Bohachuk hails from Ukraine but his new home is Big Bear, California, where he trains under the expert tutelage of Abel Sanchez.

Bohachuk turned professional in February 2017 guided by Sanchez and Leo Khorolinsky, who also manages former cruiserweight titlist Murat Gassiev. After several fights, the pair convinced Tom Loeffler of 360 Promotions to come on board, and Bohachuk has become a fixture of the promoter's club shows at The Avalon in Hollywood, as well as the undercards of Loeffler's star client, Gennady Golovkin.

"He has a lot of similarities to Triple G," Loeffler told The Ring. "He's a very hard-working guy, trains really hard, and has a big punch, which Abel is continuing to polish. He seems like a really humble guy, likes to do his thing, likes to fight."

Sanchez also cites Bohachuk's work ethic as a major asset.

"He's just such a committed guy to what he's doing," said Sanchez. "He's the fastest runner I have here, probably the most punctual guy I have here. He just works hard.

"He's not (Vasiliy) Lomachenko or (Aleksandr) Usyk gifted. His success is because of his hard work. He's not one of those very, very talented kids; he's just a hard worker."

So far, Bohachuk has won all 13 of his fights inside the distance, but Sanchez is constantly in his ear about not falling in love with his punching power.

"I would like for him not to get caught up in his record, because he's not (Deontay) Wilder," said the straight-talking trainer. "That's something I keep reminding him at the gym: He's not that kind of puncher. He's got to work for the knockout, not depend on one shot. But he's an aggressive, accurate puncher, works up and down, works the body very well. Most of his knockouts have come to the body."

Bohachuk comes from a very poor background and began boxing when he was 10 years old. He had 170 amateur bouts, losing 20. He fought a handful of times in the semi-professional World Series of Boxing prior to making the transition to pro and joining the new wave of Eastern European talent that has settled in the United States. The 24-year-old is in the next generation behind the Ukrainian "Dream Team" that featured Lomachenko, Usyk and Oleksandr Gvozdyk.

Since Bohachuk started training at The Summit gym in Big Bear, he has sparred with a number of Sanchez's other boxers, including Golovkin and 154-pound contender Michel Soro.

"Everybody in here who's around his weight loves to spar with him," said Sanchez. "I have Michel Soro and he refuses to spar with anybody else, because this kid is so aggressive and on top of you. He makes you work, and if you make mistakes, he makes you pay for it. He's in demand here because of his style.

"He's probably sparred about four times with Triple G. Obviously Triple G is a lot bigger and wasn't trying to hurt him or hit him that hard, but still, Triple G had to be on his Ps and Qs because of the aggressiveness."

In his most recent fight, Bohachuk stopped former 140-pound contender Cleotis Pendarvis in three rounds.

"We're already in the Triple G syndrome where it's hard to get guys to fight him," said Loeffler.

"He reminds me a lot of a Ukrainian Tommy Hearns. A lot of leverage on his punches. Maybe not the hand speed of Tommy Hearns, but he has the workrate. He also not only throws hard punches, but he outworks his opponents."

"El Flaco" (Spanish for "skinny," due to his 6-foot frame) is due to return on May 19 against Mexican veteran Freddy Hernandez, either in the main event or co-feature to Loeffler's Hollywood Fight Nights club show. If all goes well, from there he could appear under Golovkin's June 8 return or on the undercard of the former unified middleweight titleholder's second fight of 2019.

"We have been very selective who we have fought him with," said Sanchez. "We have fought him in a way in that he has developed in all aspects of his game. His last fight with Pendarvis, who has a lot of experience, I was hoping it would go some rounds. I know Cleotis' ex-manager, Ed Holmes, and he told me that Cleotis was telling him, 'Boy, that's a tough guy to fight. That guy's gonna be a world champion.'

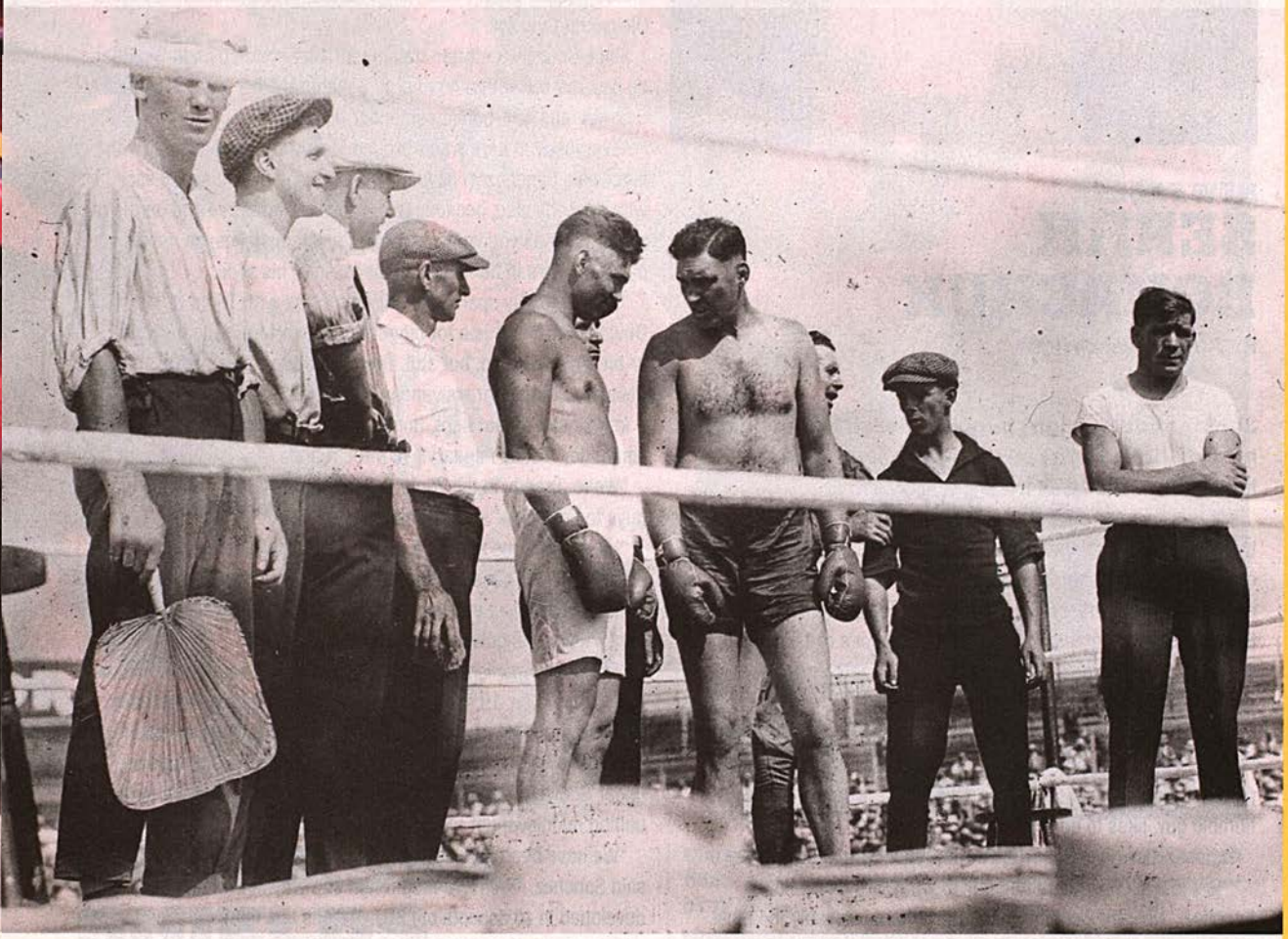
"He's got this knack – it's not a pretty knack, not somebody like Floyd Mayweather, but he has this knack of getting things done inside the ring. He doesn't look very pretty doing it, but he's very effective."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

MONTOYA IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER



THE EVOLUTION OF UNDERCARD FIGHTS

Teddy Brenner, who made fights for Madison Square Garden during the glory years when every fighter wanted to ply his trade at MSG, often said that each undercard fight is a brick in constructing a card that sells tickets and entertains the crowd.

Brenner took it for granted – as boxing fans do today – that undercard fights are part of the show. But it wasn't always so.

Boxing was illegal for much of its early history in the United States. Promoters were happy to get in one fight – forget about an undercard – before the police arrived and shut down the show.

Historian Craig Hamilton says that when John L. Sullivan fought Dominick McCaffrey on the outskirts of Cincinnati on August 29, 1885, there was an undercard bout between Tommy Warren (who eventually fought 35 recorded

With an undercard featuring six bouts, the 1919 fight between Jess Willard and Jack Dempsey was a harbinger of things to come.

fights) and Tom (or John) King (who never fought again).

That's the only time Sullivan is known to have fought with an undercard bout preceding his own. The historic September 7, 1892, contest between Sullivan and James Corbett at the Olympic Club in New Orleans was preceded by two championship fights, but they were contested on different days. On September 5, Jack McAuliffe knocked out Billy Myer to successfully defend his world lightweight title. Then, on September 6, George Dixon stopped Jack Skelly in a featherweight championship bout.

State prohibitions against the sweet science began to ease in the first decade of the 20th century. By 1910, multi-bout cards were common but considered unnecessary to draw fans to big fights. There was no undercard in Reno prior to Jack Johnson vs. James Jeffries on July 4, 1910. Only one fight preceded Johnson vs. Jess Willard in Havana on April 5, 1915.

Then Tex Rickard (who had promoted Johnson-Jeffries) saw the future. Rickard arranged for six undercard fights when Jack Dempsey challenged Jess Willard for the heavyweight throne on July 4, 1919, in Toledo, Ohio. History tells us that Serafino Sinatra (a Toledo resident who fought under the sobriquet "Wop English") brought a string of "newspaper decisions" into the ring and scored a first-round knockout over Walter "Whirlwind" Wendt (who was entering the squared circle for the first time as a pro). Then Johnny Lewis (4-2-1) stopped Tommy Long (0-3) in three rounds. Four other undercard bouts went the distance.

A new tradition had been born. Fourteen months later, when Dempsey fought Billy Miske in Benton Harbor, Michigan, Sam Langford and Harry Greb were in separate fights on the undercard.

★★★

Bruce Trampler, Top Rank's Hall of Fame matchmaker, has been described as laconic. But he's rarely at a loss for words. That said, a fighter named Edgar "Mad Dog" Ross once left Trampler speechless.

Ross was born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 1949. He did a lot of street fighting when he was young and turned pro in 1972.

"I picked him up in 1974," Trampler recalls. "I was matchmaking and managing fighters at the time and drove from Indiana to Alabama with a fighter named Jerry Evans to pick up a win. Edgar was 5-0. But he had no knockouts, two of his wins were by split decision and the guys he'd beaten couldn't fight. So what happened, of course, was Edgar beat my guy. I kept in touch with him after that. Then I moved to Orlando and started using him."

In his first fight with Trampler, on February 11, 1975, Ross knocked out a fighter named Henry "Tiger" Hall. That brought his record to 9-0. Then he lost to Charlie Grimmett, who was making his pro debut.

"At that point, I didn't see much of a future for Edgar," Trampler acknowledges. "But he kept getting better. He got down from 166 pounds to super welterweight (154), which was his best weight. He fought the guy who'd beaten him two more times and beat him both times. Edgar was a tough guy. I liked him."

By 1979, Ross had 58 wins against that one loss and a draw.

"Then I brought him to Kansas City to fight Tony Chiaverini," Trampler remembers. "That's when the bubble burst. Chiaverini was a different class of fighter. He beat the crap out of Edgar and knocked him out in the 10th round. After the fight, I was taking Edgar's gloves off just outside the ring. He looked at me and, in a way that demanded an answer, said, 'Bruce, why didn't you tell me how bad I am?' I was speechless. I didn't know what to say. And Edgar never fought again."

One would like to think that the story has a happy ending. But it doesn't. In Ross's later years, he suffered from seizures and serious cognitive issues. For a while, he lived on the streets, eating out of dumpsters. Then a cousin who owned a trailer took him in and cared for him. He died on June 19, 2012, at age 62.

"It was really kind of a blessing that the Lord came and got him," a friend of Ross named Randy Frazier told a reporter for the Tuscaloosa News. "He really at that point didn't have much of a life."

★★★

Some Thoughts on the Underside of Boxing:

Art Bayliss: "I'm tired of this bulls---. I'm not making money. I'm getting all beat up for nothing."

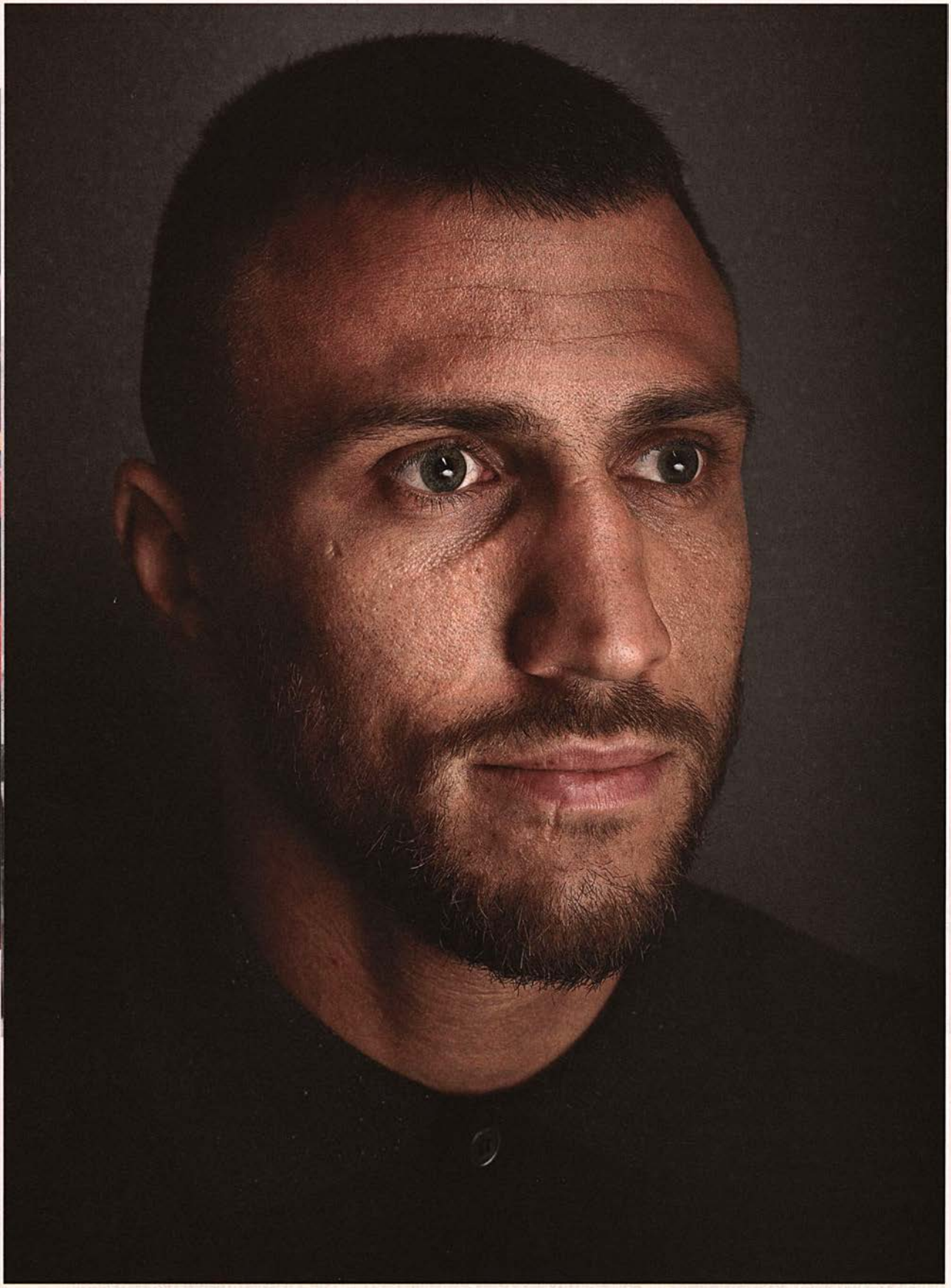
Kevin Rooney: "Boxers have always been the prostitutes of the sport. Promoters and managers are the pimps."

Jerry Izenberg: "Most people have a dark side. A fighter's dark side is darker than most."

Andre Berto: "I don't know too many fighters that have retired satisfied."

Larry Merchant: "Boxing is not about happy endings. At the end of a chapter, maybe. But not at the end of many books." RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Protect Yourself at All Times – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.



VASILIY LOMACHENKO

THE FACE OF BOXING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK**

TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was created in 1922 and disintegrated into 15 separate nations in 1991. It lives on today through its component parts.

The three men pictured on these pages were born into the old order. Vasiliy Lomachenko in Ukraine in 1988, Sergey Kovalev in Russia in 1983 and Wladimir Klitschko in Kazakhstan in 1976.

"Each photograph brings back special memories for me," photographer Wojtek Urbanek says.

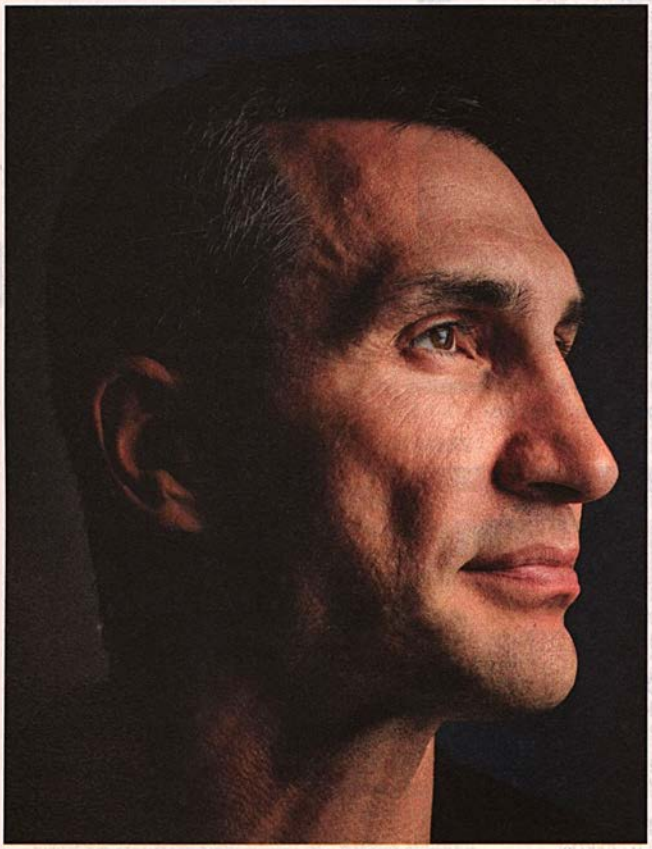
For Lomachenko, it was at a boxing writers dinner in New York. "There was a mob of people around him. Then he stepped away from the mob and sat down in front of my camera. He was much smaller than I'd thought he would be. And he had a studious look about him, not at all like a fighter. But the camera saw what I didn't see at first and what opponents in the ring have to deal with. This is a fighter."

"Kovalev," Urbanek continues, "was one of the first fighters I photographed. He was very polite and willing to please."

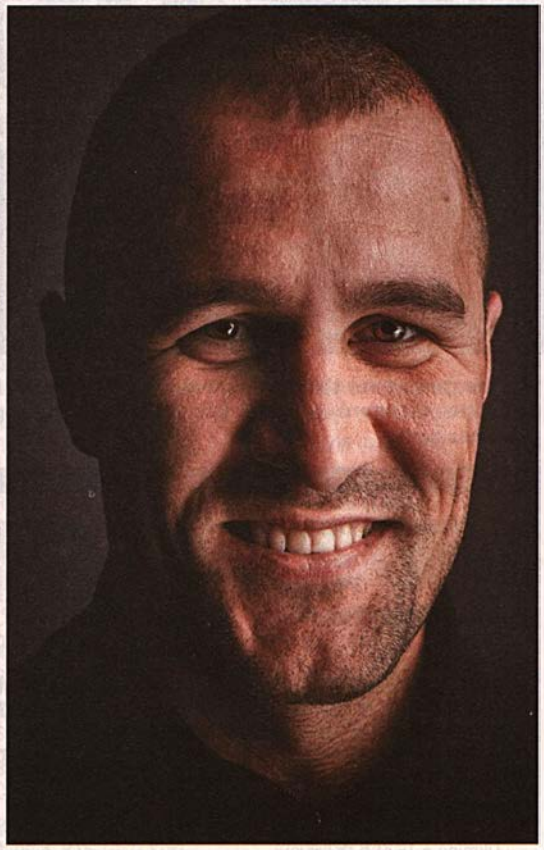
And Klitschko?

"I got goosebumps," Urbanek recalls. "When I was young, I used to play PlayStation and I would choose to box against Klitschko. So now Wladimir Klitschko is sitting in front of my camera. I'm looking at him through my lens. It was a surreal feeling. I said to myself 'Omigod!'"

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.



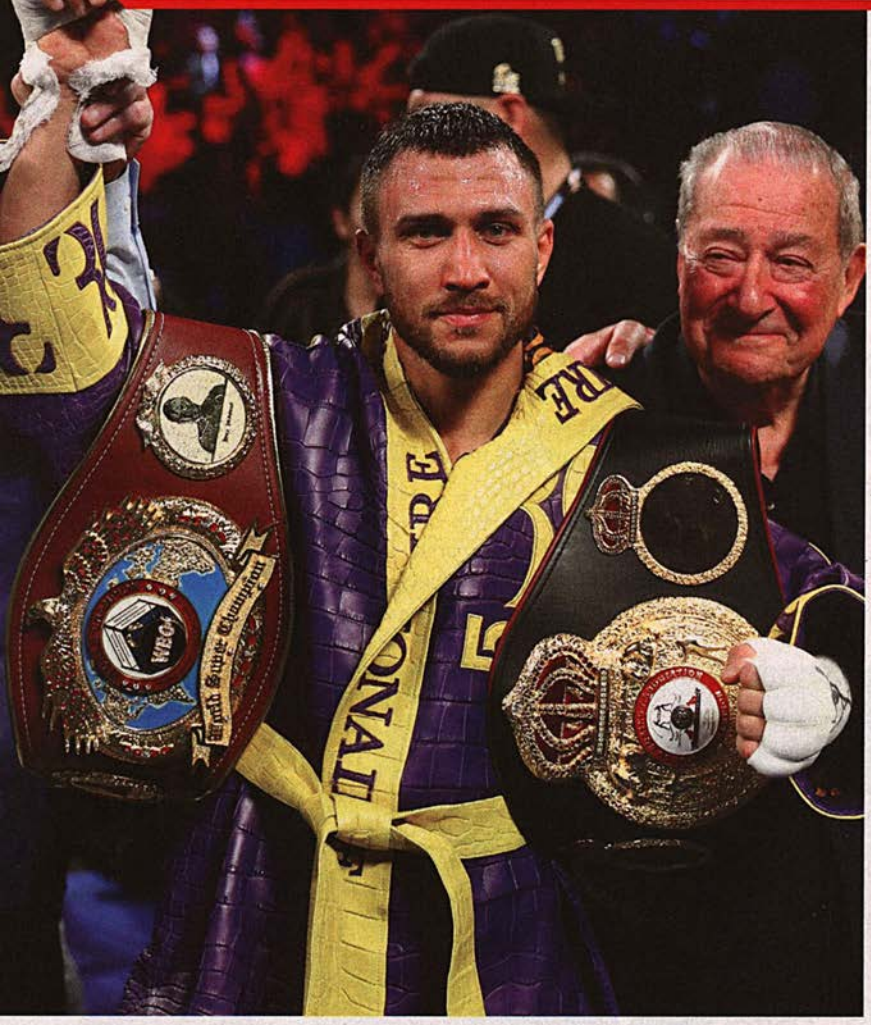
WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO



SERGEY KOVALEV

RATINGS

POUND FOR POUND ★ RATINGS ANALYSIS ★ THE RING RATINGS



Whether people say the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter is Vasiliy Lomachenko or Terence Crawford, promoter Bob Arum (right) is happy either way; he promotes both.

POUND FOR POUND

1 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)

4 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

5 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)

6 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 38-1-1 (34 KOs)

7 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)

8 **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 47-4-1 (41 KOs)

9 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 39-1-0 (30 KOs)

10 **DONNIE NIETES**
Philippines • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND: No change.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: No. 9-rated Jarrell Miller was slated for a career-defining shot at Anthony Joshua in June, but instead popped positive for not one, not two, but three banned substances, thus scuttling the fight. (He was also set to appear on the cover and in the lead feature for this issue, so on behalf of all of us: Thanks for the lost hours of sleep, Jarrell.) "Big Baby" was dropped from the list and undefeated Colombian Oscar Rivas took the vacancy at No. 10.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: No change.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: The hype around Jaime Munguia (No. 2 last month) was dialed back a notch in the form of a drop to No. 3 after he only just managed a majority decision over Dennis Hogan (unrated) to defend his WBO title.

WELTERWEIGHTS: Egidijus Kavaliauskas (No. 8 last month) slipped to No. 10 after an unimpressive draw against Philadelphia's Ray Robinson, who will ALWAYS be impressive for his audacity in choosing boxing as a career with that name.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Anthony Crolla (No. 4 last month) was expected to lose against division champion and No. 1 pound-for-pounder Vasiliy Lomachenko, and that prediction came true in spectacular fashion. The Mancunian fell to No. 10, landing almost as hard as he did when he was dropped on his face in the fourth round by a right hook from Loma. Teofimo Lopez, who has responded with contempt to any suggestion that Lomachenko would pose a challenge, rose from No. 7 to No. 6 after a five-round destruction of

Gilberto Ramirez went to light heavyweight for a fourth-round stoppage of Tommy Karpency but still holds a title at 168.

Edis Tatli (unrated) on the Terence Crawford-Amir Khan undercard.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: In his 28th fight, Mexico's Eduardo Hernandez crossed the border for the first time and continued to impress, lifting his record to 28 wins with 25 knockouts by taking care of Ibrahim Mgender (unrated) in the second frame of a 10-rounder in California. Hernandez rose from No. 10 to No. 9 as a result.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Jessie Magdaleno (No. 7 last month) left the division for a successful foray at 126 against Rico Ramos (UD 10), so those formerly below him gained a notch and undefeated 22-year-old Brandon "The Heartbreaker" Figueroa entered at No. 10 (Google him and decide for yourself if the nickname fits). Diego De La Hoya, the cousin of another heartbreaker, went north to 126 for what ended up being a no-contest, but the change appears to be permanent, so he was dropped from his spot at No. 7. Japan's Shingo Wake came in at No. 10.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

FLYWEIGHTS: No. 4-rated Andrew Selby was shocked by a relentlessly scrappy Julio Cesar Martinez (unrated), who nailed the Welshman's liver with a perfect left hook and dropped him for the count. Selby slipped to No. 7 and Martinez came in at No. 4, which meant somebody had to leave; McWilliams Arroyo (No. 9) was selected for elimination over No. 10-rated Ryoichi Taguchi, who was deemed by the ratings panel to have more potential for future gains.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No change.

STRAWWEIGHTS: Tsubasa Koura's rise toward being the next big little thing was derailed by a surprise stoppage loss to Filipino journeyman Lito Dante (unrated). The previously undefeated Koura (No. 8 last month) was dropped from the list and Dante's unbeaten countryman Samuel Salva entered at No. 10.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ANTHONY JOSHUA** U.K. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2 TYSON FURY** U.K. • 27-0-1 (19 KOs)
- **3 DEONTAY WILDER** U.S. • 40-0-1 (39 KOs)
- **4 DILLIAN WHYTE** U.K. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **5 LUIS ORTIZ** Cuba • 31-1-0 (26 KOs)
- **6 ALEXANDER POVETKIN** Russia • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)
- **7 JOSEPH PARKER** New Zealand • 25-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **8 ADAM KOWNACKI** U.S. • 19-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **9 KUBRAT PULEV** Bulgaria • 27-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **10 OSCAR RIVAS** Colombia • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

- **C ALEKSANDR USYK** Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS** Latvia • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **2 MURAT GASSIEV** Russia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **3 YUNIER DORTICOS** Cuba • 23-1-0 (21 KOs)
- **4 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** Poland • 31-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **5 DENIS LEBEDEV** Russia • 32-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **6 ANDREW TABITI** U.S. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **7 MAKSIM VLASOV** Russia • 42-3-0 (25 KOs)
- **8 KEVIN LERENA** S. Africa • 22-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **9 ILUNGA MAKABU** Congo • 24-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **10 ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** France • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** Ukraine • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **2 SERGEY KOVALEV** Russia • 33-3-1 (28 KOs)
- **3 DMITRY BIVOL** Russia • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **4 MARCUS BROWNE** U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **5 ELEIDER ALVAREZ** Colombia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6 ARTUR BETERBIEV** Russia • 13-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **7 BADOU JACK** Sweden • 22-2-3 (13 KOs)
- **8 SULLIVAN BARRERA** Cuba • 22-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **9 SVEN FORNLING** Sweden • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **10 ANTHONY YARDE** U.K. • 18-0-0 (17 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

- **C CALLUM SMITH** U.K. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **1 GILBERTO RAMIREZ** Mexico • 40-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **2 DAVID BENAVIDEZ** U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3 CALEB PLANT** U.S. • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **4 ANTHONY DIRRELL** U.S. • 33-1-1 (24 KOs)
- **5 CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)
- **6 CHRIS EUBANK JR.** U.K. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 JOSE UZCATEGUI** Venezuela • 28-3-0 (23 KOs)
- **8 CALEB TRUAX** U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)
- **9 JESSE HART** U.S. • 25-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **10 JUERGEN BRAEHMER** Germany • 50-3-0 (36 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of April 20, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

- **C CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)
- **1 GENNADY GOLOVKIN** Kaz. • 38-1-1 (34 KOs)
- **2 DANIEL JACOBS** U.S. • 35-2-0 (29 KOs)
- **3 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** U.K. • 27-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **4 ROB BRANT** U.S. • 25-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **5 DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** U.S. • 27-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **6 JERMALL CHARLO** U.S. • 28-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **8 DAVID LEMIEUX** Canada • 40-4-0 (34 KOs)
- **9 MACIEJ SULECKI** Poland • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **10 HASSAN N'DAM** France • 37-3-0 (21 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

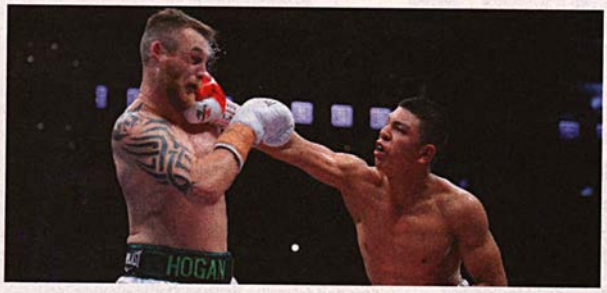
- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 JARRETT HURD** U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **2 ERISLANDY LARA** Cuba • 25-3-3 (14 KOs)
- **3 JAIME MUNGUIA** Mexico • 33-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **4 BRIAN CASTANO** Argentina • 15-0-1 (11 KOs)
- **5 TONY HARRISON** U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **6 JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **7 MICHEL SORO** France • 33-2-1 (22 KOs)
- **8 JULIAN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 26-1-1 (16 KOs)
- **9 KELL BROOK** U.K. • 38-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **10 ERICKSON LUBIN** U.S. • 20-1-0 (15 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

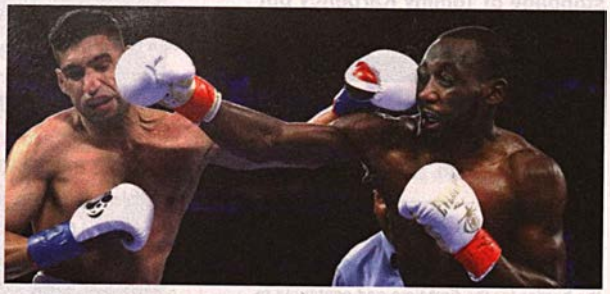
- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ERROL SPENCE JR.** U.S. • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2 TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **3 KEITH THURMAN** U.S. • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4 SHAWN PORTER** U.S. • 30-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **5 MANNY PACQUIAO** Phil. • 61-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **6 DANNY GARCIA** U.S. • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 YORDENIS UGAS** Cuba • 23-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **8 JEFF HORN** Australia • 19-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **9 JESSIE VARGAS** U.S. • 28-2-2 (10 KOs)
- **10 EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** Lithuania • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 REGIS PROGRAIS** U.S. • 23-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **2 JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3 JOSE RAMIREZ** U.S. • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **4 KIRYL RELIKH** Belarus • 23-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **5 MAURICE HOOKER** U.S. • 26-0-3 (17 KOs)
- **6 IVAN BARANCHYK** Russia • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7 VIKTOR POSTOL** Ukraine • 30-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **8 SERGEY LIPINETS** Russia • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **9 EDUARD TROYANOVSKY** Russia • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
- **10 JOSE ZEPEDA** U.S. • 30-2-0 (25 KOs)



Jaime Munguia has been on fire, but he had some unexpected trouble in eking out a majority decision over Dennis Hogan.



Terence Crawford looked to be on his way to mowing down Amir Khan when a low blow ended the contest early.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

- **C VASILIY LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **1 MIKEY GARCIA** U.S. • 39-1-0 (30 KOs)
- **2 RICHARD COMMEY** Ghana • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3 ROBERT EASTER** U.S. • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **4 LUKE CAMPBELL** U.K. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **5 JOSE PEDRAZA** P.R. • 25-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **6 TEOFIMO LOPEZ** U.S. • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **7 DEVIN HANEY** U.S. • 21-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **8 JAVIER FORTUNA** Dom. Rep. • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)
- **9 EMMANUEL TAGOE** Ghana • 30-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **10 ANTHONY CROLLA** U.K. • 34-7-3 (13 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 MIGUEL BERCHELT** Mexico • 35-1-0 (31 KOs)
- **2 GERVONTA DAVIS** U.S. • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **3 TEVIN FARMER** U.S. • 29-4-1 (6 KOs)
- **4 FRANCISCO VARGAS** Mexico • 25-1-2 (18 KOs)
- **5 MASAYUKI ITO** Japan • 25-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **6 ANDREW CANCIO** U.S. • 20-4-2 (15 KOs)
- **7 JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** U.S. • 28-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **8 MIGUEL ROMAN** Mexico • 61-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **9 EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** Mexico • 28-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **10 ALBERTO MACHADO** P.R. • 21-1-0 (17 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 LEO SANTA CRUZ** U.S. • 36-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2 JOSH WARRINGTON** U.K. • 28-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **3 GARY RUSSELL JR.** U.S. • 29-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **4 OSCAR VALDEZ** Mexico • 25-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **5 CARL FRAMPTON** U.K. • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **6 ABNER MARES** Mexico • 31-3-1 (15 KOs)
- **7 SCOTT QUIGG** U.K. • 35-2-2 (26 KOs)
- **8 XU CAN** China • 16-2-0 (2 KOs)
- **9 TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR** Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **10 KID GALAHAD** U.K. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** Cuba • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **2 REY VARGAS** Mexico • 33-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3 EMANUEL NAVARRETE** Mexico • 26-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **4 DANIEL ROMAN** U.S. • 26-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **5 ISAAC DOGBOE** Ghana • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **6 TJ DOHENY** Australia • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **7 TOMOKI KAMEDA** Japan • 36-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **8 RYOSUKE IWASA** Japan • 26-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **9 BRANDON FIGUEROA** U.S. • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10 SHINGO WAKE** Japan • 26-5-2 (18 KOs)

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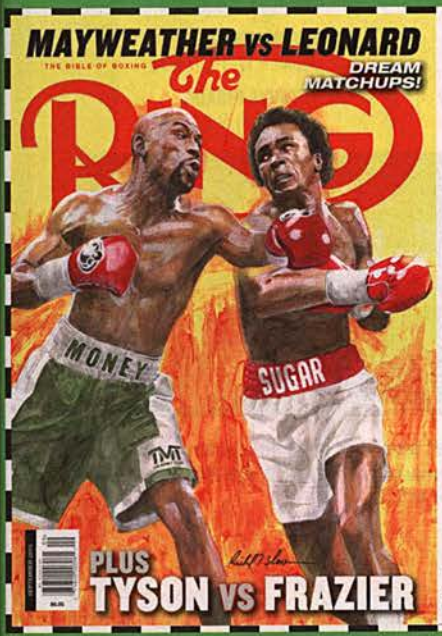

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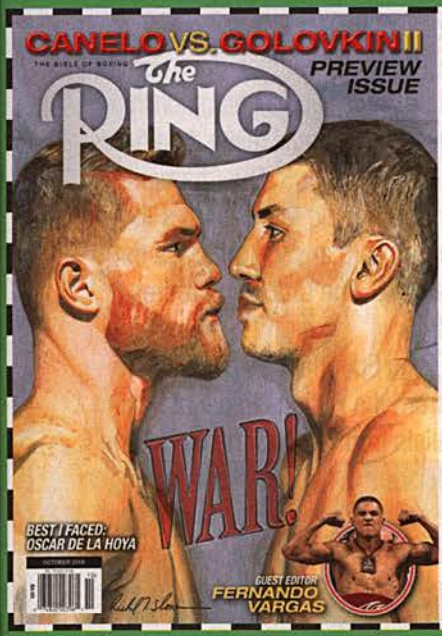

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RATINGS

Through fights of April 20, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)
2 ZOLANI TETE
S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
3 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
P.R. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
4 LUIS NERY
Mexico • 29-0-0 (23 KOs)
5 NONITO DONAIRE
Phil. • 39-5-0 (25 KOs)
6 RYAN BURNETT
U.K. • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
7 NORDINE OUBAALI
France • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
8 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 18-1-0 (15 KOs)
9 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)
10 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 37-3-1 (27 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 47-4-1 (41 KOs)
1 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 38-3-0 (26 KOs)
2 DONNIE NIETES
Phil. • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
3 KHALID YAFAI
U.K. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
4 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 23-2-0 (13 KOs)
5 JERWIN ANCAJAS
Phil. • 30-1-2 (20 KOs)
6 ROMAN GONZALEZ
Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
8 ASTON PALICTE
Phil. • 25-2-1 (21 KOs)
9 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 30-4-1 (21 KOs)
10 ALEJANDRO BARRIOS
Mexico • 17-2-5 (8 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 MORUTI MTHALANE
S. Africa • 37-2-0 (25 KOs)
3 ARTEM DALAKIAN
Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
4 JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ
Mexico • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
5 CHARLIE EDWARDS
U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)
6 SHO KIMURA
Japan • 18-2-2 (11 KOs)
7 ANDREW SELBY
U.K. • 11-1-0 (6 KOs)
8 CRISTOFER ROSALES
Nicaragua • 28-4-0 (19 KOs)
9 MASAYUKI KURODA
Japan • 30-7-3 (16 KOs)
10 RYOICHI TAGUCHI
Japan • 27-4-2 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C HIROTO KYOGUCHI
Japan • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 KEN SHIRO
Japan • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 HEKKIE BUDLER
S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
3 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
4 ANGEL ACOSTA
P.R. • 20-1-0 (20 KOs)
5 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 34-2-0 (30 KOs)
6 REY LORETO
Phil • 24-14-0 (16 KOs)
7 MILAN MELINDO
Phil. • 37-4-0 (13 KOs)
8 EDWARD HENO
Phil. • 14-0-5 (5 KOs)
9 REIYA KONISHI
Japan • 17-1-0 (7 KOs)
10 TETSUYA HISADA
Japan • 34-9-2 (20 KOs)

Welterweight title contender Egidijus Kavaliauskas, left, and Ray Robinson fought to a majority draw.

Teofimo Lopez has been tagged as a potentially dangerous opponent for Vasiliy Lomachenko with wins like his fifth-round knockout of Edis Tatli.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
Thailand • 52-0-0 (18 KOs)
3 VIC SALUDAR
Phil. • 19-3-0 (10 KOs)
4 BYRON ROJAS
Nicaragua • 26-4-3 (11 KOs)
5 SIMPHIWE KHONCO
S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)
6 DEEJAY KRIEL
S. Africa • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)
7 JOSE ARGUMEDO
Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
8 TATSUYA FUKUHARA
Japan • 21-6-6 (7 KOs)
9 CARLOS LICONA
U.S. • 14-1-0 (2 KOs)
10 SAMUEL SALVA
Phil. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)

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RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

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A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

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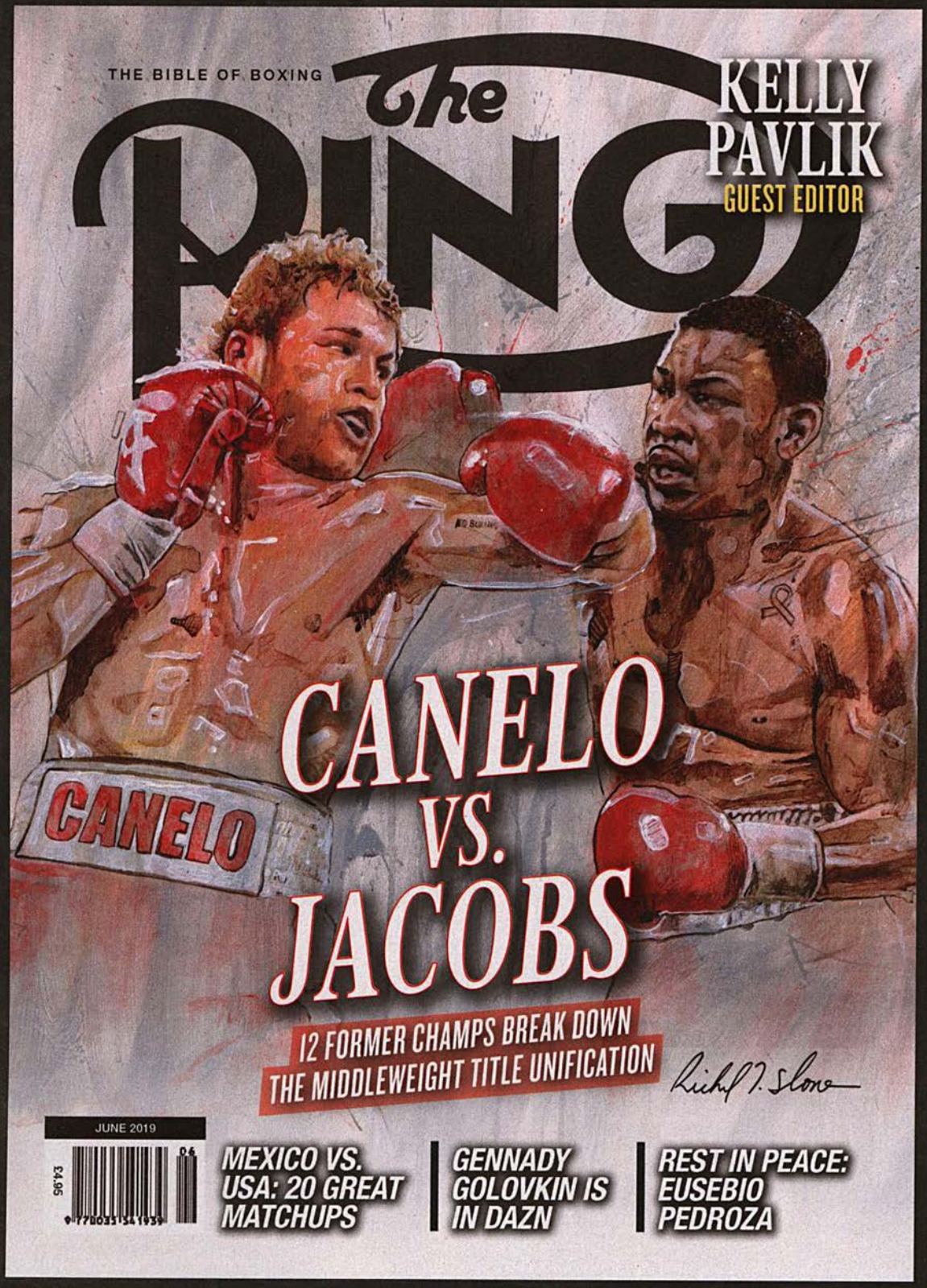

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ENGLISHMAN IN NEW YORK

ANTHONY JOSHUA WILL JOIN A RICH AND PERILOUS HISTORY OF U.K. FIGHTERS TESTING THEMSELVES IN THE BIG APPLE

By **Don Stradley**

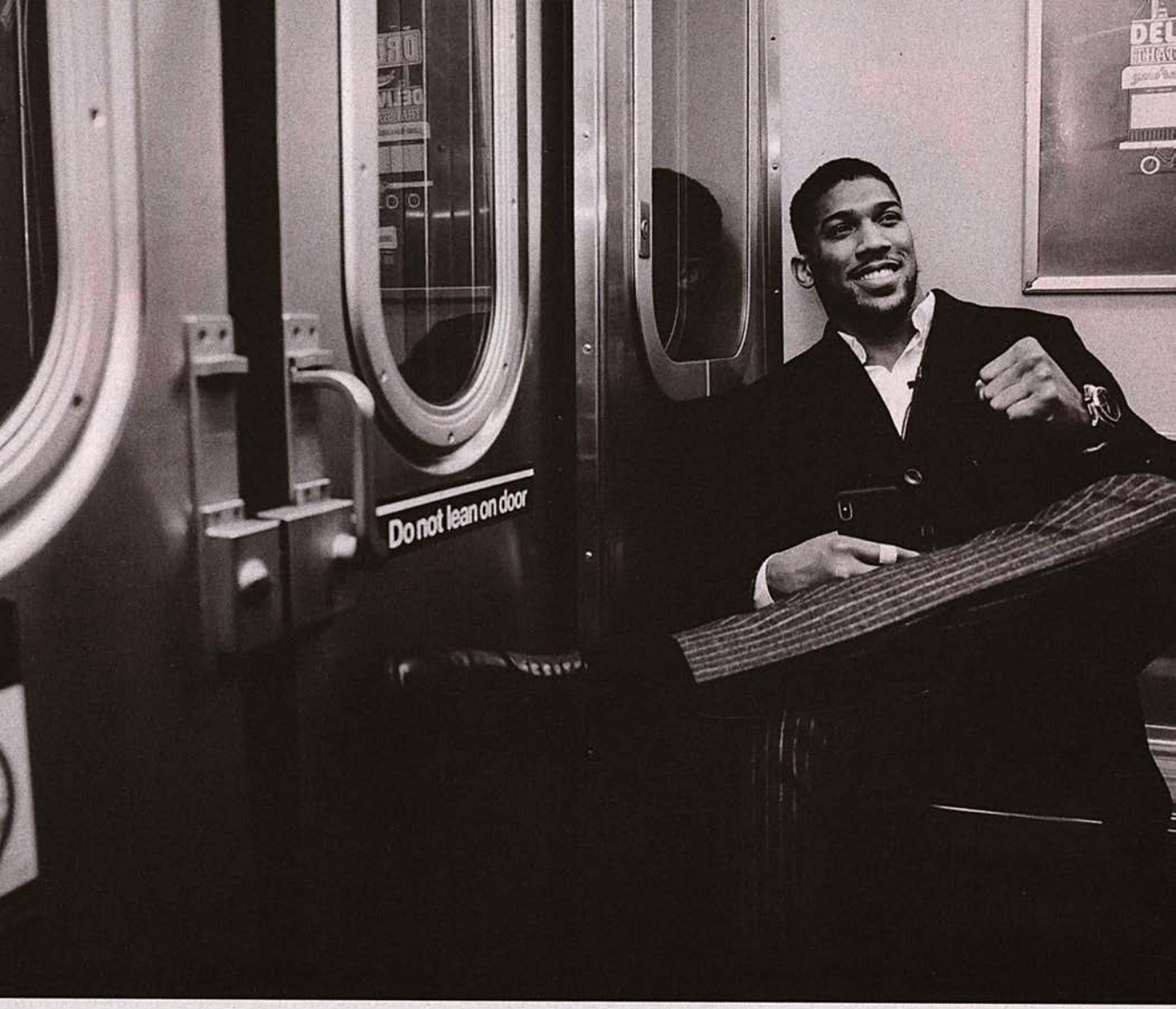
When England's Anthony Joshua enters Madison Square Garden for his June bout, he may find out what other Brits have been learning for more than a century. That is, New York isn't easy. Audiences can be cynical, the press can be unforgiving and the competition will be throwing hard stuff. There's also an old saying that probably originated in New York's theater district: The show must go on. This is regardless of when the unexpected happens, such as when Joshua's original opponent, Brooklyn's Jarrell "Big Baby" Miller, tested positive for three banned substances and was denied a boxing license. This surprise development sent promoter Eddie Hearn scrambling to find a suitable replacement. After all, this was the big Brit's New York debut, and Hearn couldn't just scrap it. Of course, a slugger like Miller presented his own set of dangers, but Joshua may have preferred Miller to the dreaded "last-minute substitute," those underdogs who come in with nothing to lose and can sometimes create hell for even the best fighters. Granted, Joshua didn't become a multi-belt heavyweight sensation without some difficult challenges, but if the history of Brits in the Big Apple tells us anything, Joshua's Garden debut could be a rite of passage he'll never forget.

Anyone who saw it remembers the night in 1997 when "Prince" Naseem Hamed, the Sheffield slugging machine, treated Madison Square Garden fans to a seven-minute dance routine before his brawl with Kevin Kelley. Both men were knocked to the canvas three times before Hamed scored the KO at 2:27 of Round 4. Not as dramatic but still impressive was Joe Calzaghe's maiden New York appearance in 2008. He survived a first-round knockdown to defeat Roy Jones Jr. by decision. Amir Khan stayed upright during his 2010 New York premiere, stopping Paulie Malignaggi in the 11th, but Tyson Fury had the typically rough New York debut for a Brit in 2013. Fury scored a seventh-round knockout of Steve Cunningham at what is now the Garden's Hulu Theater, but not before being dropped hard in the second round.

The New York unveiling of Lennox Lewis in 1996 was a near-disaster. Lewis escaped from New York with a majority decision over Ray Mercer, his ears burning from the jeers of an unimpressed Garden crowd. Lewis revisited the city in 1999 for a major bout with Evander Holyfield. This time Lewis boxed well but earned only a draw on the scorecards. Perhaps feeling the third time would be the charm, he returned in 2000, crushing Michael Grant in two rounds and exorcising what had appeared to be a New York jinx. Of course, the urbane Lewis doesn't strike us as a believer in bad luck, but there was a period of time when boxers from the United Kingdom simply couldn't win in New York. Plenty made the journey only to fall flat on their faces.

No less than the legendary Jimmy Wilde flopped in his New York debut. Semi-retired at 31 but still considered the champion of the flyweights, the Welshman agreed to face Pancho Villa at the Polo Grounds on June 18, 1923. Before an audience of 40,000, Villa nailed Wilde with a shot after the bell ending Round 2. Wilde never quite recovered from Villa's late punch, though he hung on until the fight was mercifully stopped

Anthony Joshua, by far the biggest boxing attraction in Europe, seems confident that his star power will carry over to his U.S. debut at the famous Madison Square Garden.



Like other British fighters in past decades, Joshua will have his mettle tested in his NYC debut.

in the seventh and awarded to Villa. Brits argued that hitting after the bell would've gotten Villa disqualified in the U.K., but New York referee Patsy Haley, with his own interpretation of the rules, let the fight go on. Wilde never fought again. His career came to an end in New York.

Villa's late punch recalled concerns voiced by Percy Sholto Douglas, the 10th Marquess of Queensberry, whose father had endorsed the rules of modern boxing in the 1860s. During a New York visit in 1911, Douglas witnessed a very rough fight between Billy Papke and Sailor Burke. Dismayed by the amount of clinching and fouling he saw, Douglas described the contest in a syndicated column as "really absurd." He added that in America, "The original ideas of my father are by no means carried out." Of course, a few U.K. stars did well in New York, even during those years when American fighters seemed like cavemen. Their successes may have encouraged Bombardier Billy Wells, a stylish young man billed as the heavyweight champion of England, to try his luck.

On a June night in 1912, Wells entered the Garden to fight Al Palzer, the pride of the Iowa prairies. This greatly anticipated contest was promoted as an eliminator to find a challenger for champion Jack Johnson. Wells floored Palzer in the first round, but he couldn't cope with Palzer's rough style and 40-pound weight advantage. After suffering three knockdowns, Wells collapsed from a body shot at 2:44 of the third. Wells defeated Tom Kennedy in New York a month later, but in 1913 he returned to the Garden only to be knocked out in the second round by Gunboat Smith. Wells' loss to Smith, which saw him knocked cold, ended his New York campaign and helped inspire a snarky headline in the Buffalo Enquirer that read, "British Boxers Made of Glass?"

Phil Scott, a highly touted heavyweight from London, hit New York in November 1927. Despite much fanfare, Scott was demolished in one round by Denmark's unremarkable Knute Hansen. To his credit, even as local sportswriters belted away at their Underwoods to produce some nasty insults, Scott went on to win a few New York bouts. Whatever goodwill he created,

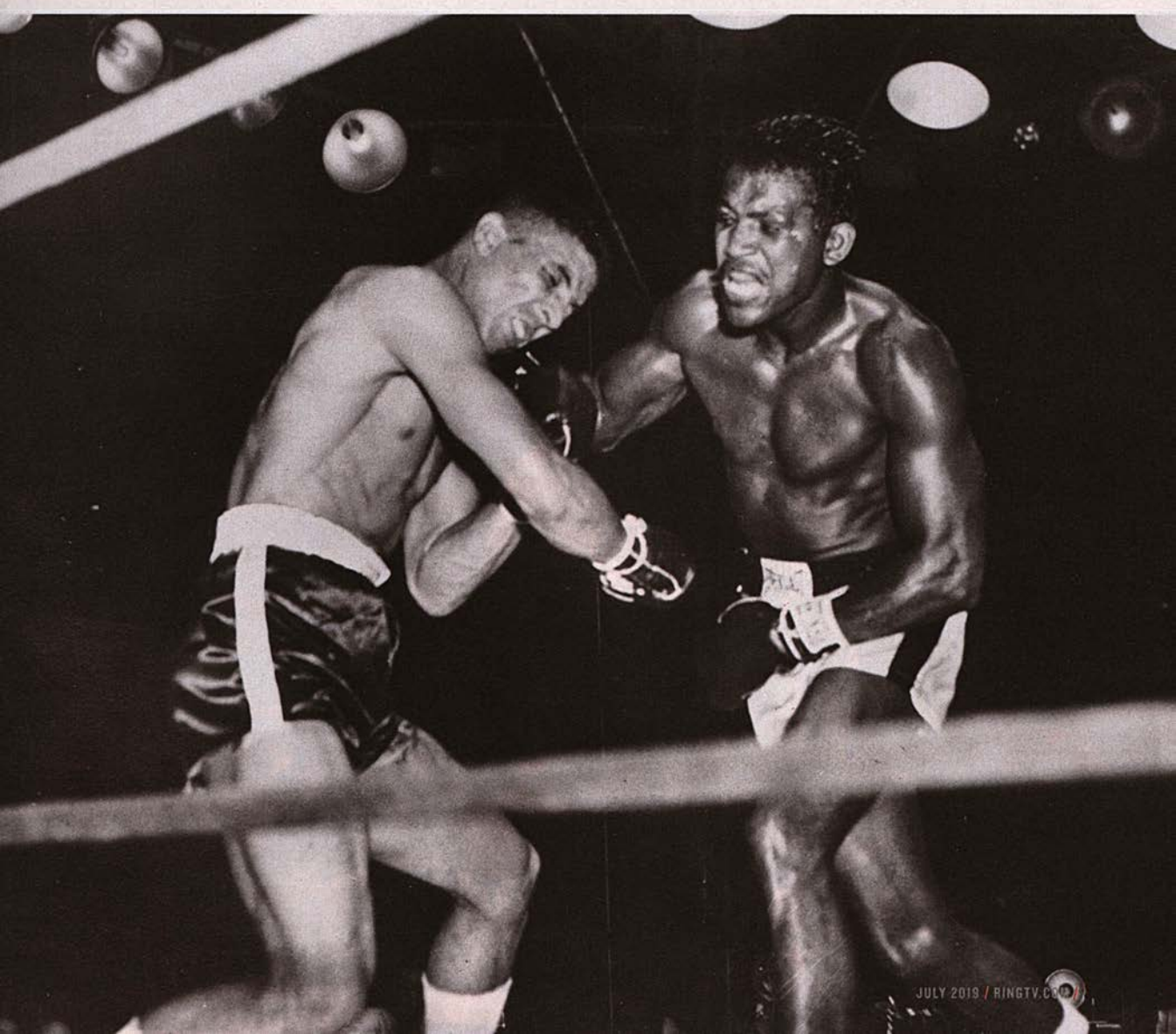
however, was undone in 1929 when a tap on the groin left him the writhing winner by disqualification over Otto von Porat. It also left Garden customers thinking he was a faker. Scott was remembered for years as "Fainting Phil."

Wells and Scott helped establish the long-running stigma of the United Kingdom's "horizontal heavyweights," a concept that was very much alive in 1937 when Welshman Tommy Farr came to Yankee Stadium to challenge new champion Joe Louis. Farr, a 5-1 underdog, lost a 15-round decision but clearly impressed the customers with an effort that was decidedly non-horizontal. "Reeling and glassy-eyed in the closing rounds, he kept fighting back – lurching right into Louis' fire, his chin thrust ahead of his dragging feet, throwing futile punches, winning yells of admiration from the crowd," wrote John Lardner. The fight was hailed as one of the year's best, and promoter Mike Jacobs immediately booked Farr for more Garden bouts. Unfortunately, Farr lost them all. "We suggest Tommy Farr return to England quietly," chided columnist Jim Morse, "and forget all about American fighters." And that's basically what Farr did.

Facing Louis in your New York debut would be daunting, but fighting Sugar Ray Robinson would be equally unnerving, even if you had already beaten him once. Having stunned the boxing world in July 1951 by outpointing Robinson in London for the middleweight championship, England's Randy Turpin agreed to a rematch at the Polo Grounds later that year. This time, in front of more than 61,000 customers, Robinson took Turpin out in the 10th and regained the championship. A glutton for New York punishment, Turpin returned to the city in 1953 and absorbed a thorough 15-round beating from Bobo Olson.

Though New York fans had a reputation for being bloodthirsty, that didn't prevent them from appreciating the elegant ring generalship of Scotland's Ken Buchanan. In December 1970, on the undercard of the Muhammad Ali-Oscar Bonavena bout at Madison Square Garden, lightweight champion Buchanan took on undefeated welterweight Donato

Sugar Ray Robinson violently seized back the middleweight title from Randy Turpin at the Polo Grounds.



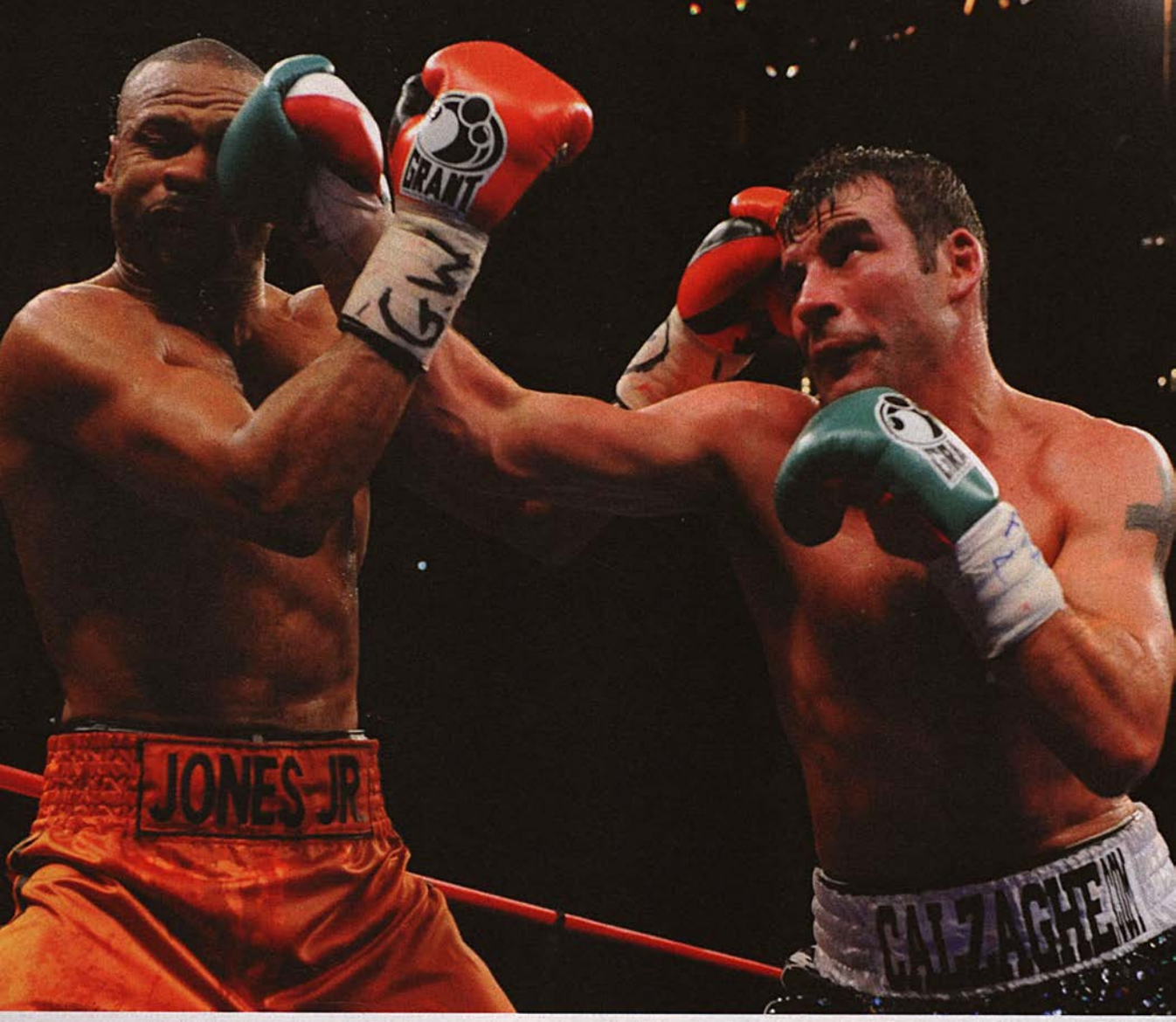
Paduano. A practitioner of the sweet science at its sweetest, Buchanan gave Paduano a 10-round tutorial. Not only did he jab and move with incredible artistry, he finished the fight by standing and slugging with Paduano, bringing the New Yorkers out of their seats to shout their approval.

With his nimble style drawing favorable comparisons to the greats of the past, Buchanan became a Garden headliner. Accompanied to the ring by bagpipers, sometimes fighting with blood streaming down his face, Buchanan had the perfect combination of panache and guts that New Yorkers loved. The Scotsman's Garden party had to end, though. In June 1972, a young Panamanian named Roberto Duran stopped him in the 13th round. Losing to Duran didn't end Buchanan's New York run, but the fact that Duran appeared to beat him with a low blow seemed another reminder that New York was still rough on U.K. fighters.

Sometimes it took a hardheaded bruiser like Jock McAvoy to survive in the New York ring. A beloved, hard-hitting British light heavyweight known as "The Rochdale Thunderbolt," McAvoy's NY debut was a 10-round decision over heavyweight journeyman Al McCoy in 1935. Then he shocked Garden fans when, in a non-title bout, he annihilated middleweight champion "Babe" Risko, dropping him six times in the first for a surprise KO. Described by the Associated Press as "the sturdiest son of Old England to reach these shores in many a day," McAvoy was treated as an overnight sensation, though he'd been in the business for many years. There was even talk that he would challenge heavyweight champion Jim Braddock. Instead, he aimed for reigning light heavyweight champion John Henry Lewis at the Garden. This time, McAvoy fell short, losing on points over 15 rounds. He left for England that week, having left a positive impression on New Yorkers. But in a career spanning nearly 150 contests, McAvoy's New York stint was just a blip on his radar.

The British boxer who thrived in New York like no other was Jackie "Kid" Berg. Nicknamed "The Whitechapel Windmill," Berg

Naseem Hamed's NYC debut was a sensational shootout with Kevin Kelley that featured six knockdowns.

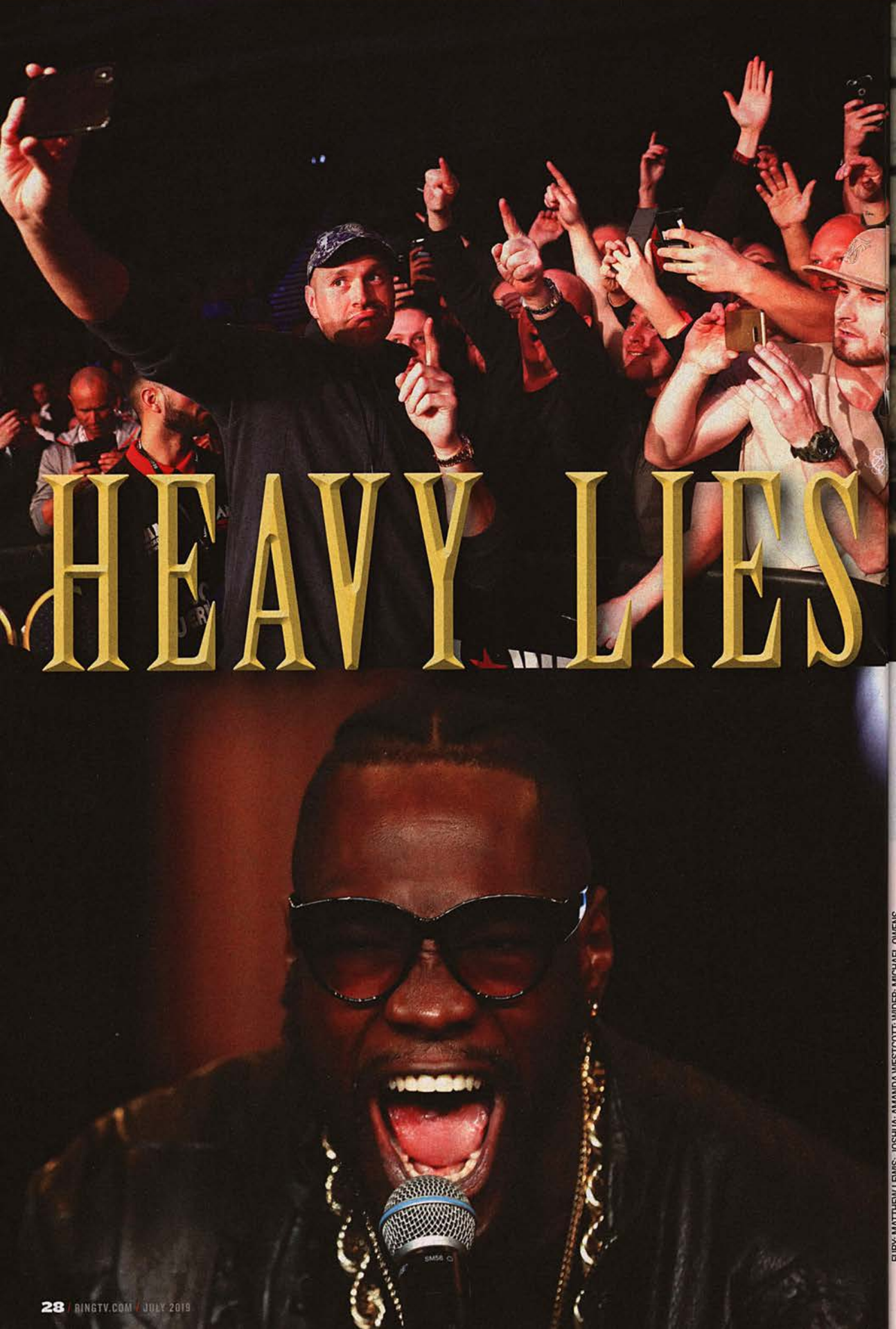


Joe Calzaghe had to survive an opening-round knockdown to outpoint Roy Jones Jr. in his NYC debut, the final bout of his career.

had fought in other American cities before coming to the Garden to face Bruce Flowers on May 10, 1929. Berg wasn't matched lightly for his New York debut. Flowers was a dynamic African American lightweight from New Rochelle who happened to be a local favorite. Despite Flowers' skill, Berg stirred the crowd with his energetic, swarming style and won a 10-round decision. The fight was such a scorcher that the Garden scheduled a rematch two weeks later. Again, Berg won a thriller on points. The United Press noted that the Gotham crowd "gave the little English boy a big ovation when he left the ring."

Berg would fight nearly 50 times in and around New York. Promoters put him in with the best of the day, from Kid Chocolate and Tony Canzoneri to Mushy Callahan and Joe Glick. He didn't always triumph, but no New Yorker ever asked for a refund after seeing Berg fight. Berg's Jewish heritage helped endear him to New York's Jewish population, but it was his style of nonstop punching that really sold tickets. When he was past his prime and could no longer command big Garden dates, he was still fighting in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. On April 4, 1939, just short of a decade after his Garden debut, Berg earned a decision over Pete Galiano at the Brooklyn Arena. Though he'd continue boxing until 1945, the win over Galiano was his final appearance in the New York area. A handful of stateside bouts followed, but complications with his visitor's permit, marital problems, gambling debts and perhaps some old-fashioned homesickness brought Berg back to England, where he finished out his career. In the 1980s, disheartened that he was no longer recognized in his home country, an elderly Berg told journalist Jonathan Rendall, "In New York everyone knows me. I can't wait to get over there." For Berg, even as old age made him a bit foggy on certain subjects, those New York ovations stayed fresh in his memory.

Of course, New York has changed since the glory days of Jackie Berg. The one thing that remains the same is that the United Kingdom's best fighters are still drawn to the place, and the results are almost always unforgettable.



Three unbeaten heavyweights in their prime have claims to the biggest prize in sports: charismatic lineal king Tyson Fury, confident unified titleholder Anthony Joshua and dangerous WBC beltholder Deontay Wilder.

HEAVY LIES THE CROWN

AMONG THE THREE 'KINGS' CAUTIOUSLY CIRCLING EACH OTHER, BOXING'S TRUE HEAVYWEIGHT THRONE CAN ONLY BE CLAIMED BY THE LAST MAN STANDING

By **Brin-Jonathan Butler**

On November 28, 2015, before a crowd of 55,000 in Dusseldorf, Germany, underdog Tyson Fury overcoming Wladimir Klitschko was like watching a giddy mariachi band drown out a bewigged harpsichordist fumbling to remember a Bach concerto on the same stage. If Fury had pulled off the upset a century ago, boxing being what it was back then, he might have overshadowed Babe Ruth in cultural real estate. With 200 years and 10 generations worth of Traveler bare-knuckle fighting blood flowing through his veins, Fury's backstory growing up in a trailer and dropping out of school at the age of 10 to begin fighting full-time made Ruth's rough childhood growing up in a Baltimore orphanage seem quaint and pedestrian by comparison. Even better, the heavyweight landscape had two other undefeated titans in their prime vying for the throne: Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua. With Klitschko dispatched, a new golden era in the heavyweight division was on the horizon. It certainly looked promising. What could go wrong? But this is boxing.

"You're boring," Fury had taunted Klitschko at the press conference before their fight. "I want to rid you out of the heavyweight division. You have about as much charisma as my underpants." The quadrilingual, PhD-adorned Klitschko mustered a meek smile in response to the onslaught. And in the ring soon after, Klitschko defended his titles and legacy on the world's stage with much the same tranquil submissiveness he'd brought to the press conference. With a week-long male-bonding seminar's worth of supportive hugs, but with only 18 punches landing that weren't jabs (only 34 of those also, mind you) across 36 minutes of "action," not all that much aggression was showcased. When not hugging it out, Klitschko's relatively placid demeanor in the ring gave every indication that, despite being paid in the neighborhood of $20 million, it was an entirely intolerable and uncivilized proposition that anyone should expect him to actually *fight* against someone his own size. After all, even against smaller opponents, historically some terrible things had happened to Klitschko during his career when he went out on the attack against the likes off Ross Puritty, Corrie Sanders and Lamon Brewster. He'd had his head taken off and been dumped on the canvas like an imploded building. Emanuel Steward had helped pick up the pieces, and with his instruction

FURY: MATTHEW LEWIS; JOSHUA: AMANDA WESTCOTT; WILDER: MICHAEL OWENS

they'd perfected a style that if *everyone* didn't enjoy and celebrate, at least German boxing fans appreciated and found irresistible. Clearly inspired by the profound legacy of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., Klitschko treated German fans to a stirring interpretive dance against Tyson Fury in thoughtful exploration of the power and moral authority of nonviolence.

Fury, the challenger born in Wythenshawe, Manchester, England, was fighting in the proverbial lion's den of the champion's adopted backyard. It was Klitschko's 50th time fighting in Germany. Fury arrived in Germany a 4-1 underdog against Klitschko, a fighter whose cumulative time on boxing's throne was unrivaled in the history of the sport, surpassing the sustained dominance of Joe Louis, Muhammad Ali, Lennox Lewis, his brother Vitali, Larry Holmes and Jack Dempsey. Yet as the final bell tolled, Fury had not just ended Klitschko's near decade-long reign as titleholder, he had toyed with him throughout the fight, hands behind his back and gleefully contemptuous of everything the Ukrainian stood for. Fury not only took Klitschko's titles cleanly with a crafty, well-earned unanimous decision, but at times made it look easy. There was almost no tension to the contest. Klitschko was barely able to put leather to flesh four times a round over the course of the entire fight.

Fury, who was named by his father after then-heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, had, at 27, outclassed and clowned his era's most feared champion. What's more, for the first time since his namesake, undefeated Tyson Fury represented the first heavyweight champion capable of transcending not just boxing but *sports* through sheer force of personality.

As with Mike Tyson before him, no novelist or screenwriter had imagined a more dynamic, flawed, ambiguous antihero in the boxing world more compellingly teetering on the brink of greatness or oblivion. Yet it soon became abundantly clear after the first two attempts to cement a rematch with Klitschko in the U.K. fell apart that Tyson Fury's rapid mental health deterioration – including bizarre statements of virulent anti-Semitism, misogyny, and homophobia – doping issues, alcoholism, drug use, ballooning weight, talks of retirement and suicide-courting, might well define his legacy as champion. And this was before he had even defended his title *once*. While Fury's meteoric rise to the title may not have surpassed Mike Tyson's in speed or impact, his precipitous freefall seemed poised to give Iron Mike a run for his money. "I hope someone kills me before I kill myself," Fury confessed.

Three-and-a-half years after Tyson Fury captured Klitschko's crown and became the lineal champion, boxing's heavyweight division remains at a perplexing impasse. ESPN, Fox, Showtime, and DAZN have sunk vast fortunes into the sport with hopes of rekindling its popularity among general sports fans. Their best shot at succeeding rests with the three best heavyweights in the world – Tyson

Joshua proved to be more than a marketable attraction by getting up from a knockdown to stop former champ Wladimir Klitschko in the 11th round of their torch-passing clash in 2017.

MICK POTTS - PA IMAGES

Fury, Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua. All three remain with a legitimate claim to the crown, are undefeated, reside in their primes, and boast a combined record of 89 wins, 79 knockouts and two draws. All three fighters have upcoming fights in the United States in the near future, none of which include fights against each other. Instead, Wilder squares off against Dominic Breazeale at Barclays Center in Brooklyn in May. Joshua headlines at Madison Square Garden in New York on June 1. And Fury will fight Tom Schwarz at the Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas on June 15.

On April 29, 2017, before a post-war record crowd of 90,000 in Wembley Stadium, Olympic gold medalist Joshua survived the first brutal knockdown of his career in the sixth round against the same Wladimir Klitschko Fury embarrassed in Germany. He miraculously gutted out a knockout victory for the ages in front of his countrymen five rounds later after the referee stopped the fight in the 11th. Joshua almost immediately called out Fury, who hadn't stepped back into the ring since defeating Klitschko. Deontay Wilder, meanwhile, after six years as a professional fighter, had claimed the WBC heavyweight title against Bermane Stiverne on January 17, 2015, at the MGM Grand, the first time he'd ever won a fight without knocking out his opponent. Wilder would go on to stop his next six opponents (including pulverizing Stiverne in a rematch before the first round was over) before facing the toughest challenge of his career against undefeated Cuban boogeyman Luis Ortiz in Brooklyn's Barclays Center on March 3, 2018. Wilder might have been auditioning for the reincarnation of Gerry Cooney's huge-punching but limited-skilled heavyweight role before displaying the courage he did surviving the beating Ortiz doled out in the seventh round. Ortiz was unable to finish him, and Wilder stormed back in the 10th and stopped the Cuban for the first time in his career, twice battering him to the canvas before the referee came to the rescue. Just as Joshua had with Klitschko, Wilder had proven he was for real. However, both had shown glaring vulnerabilities in their victories as well.

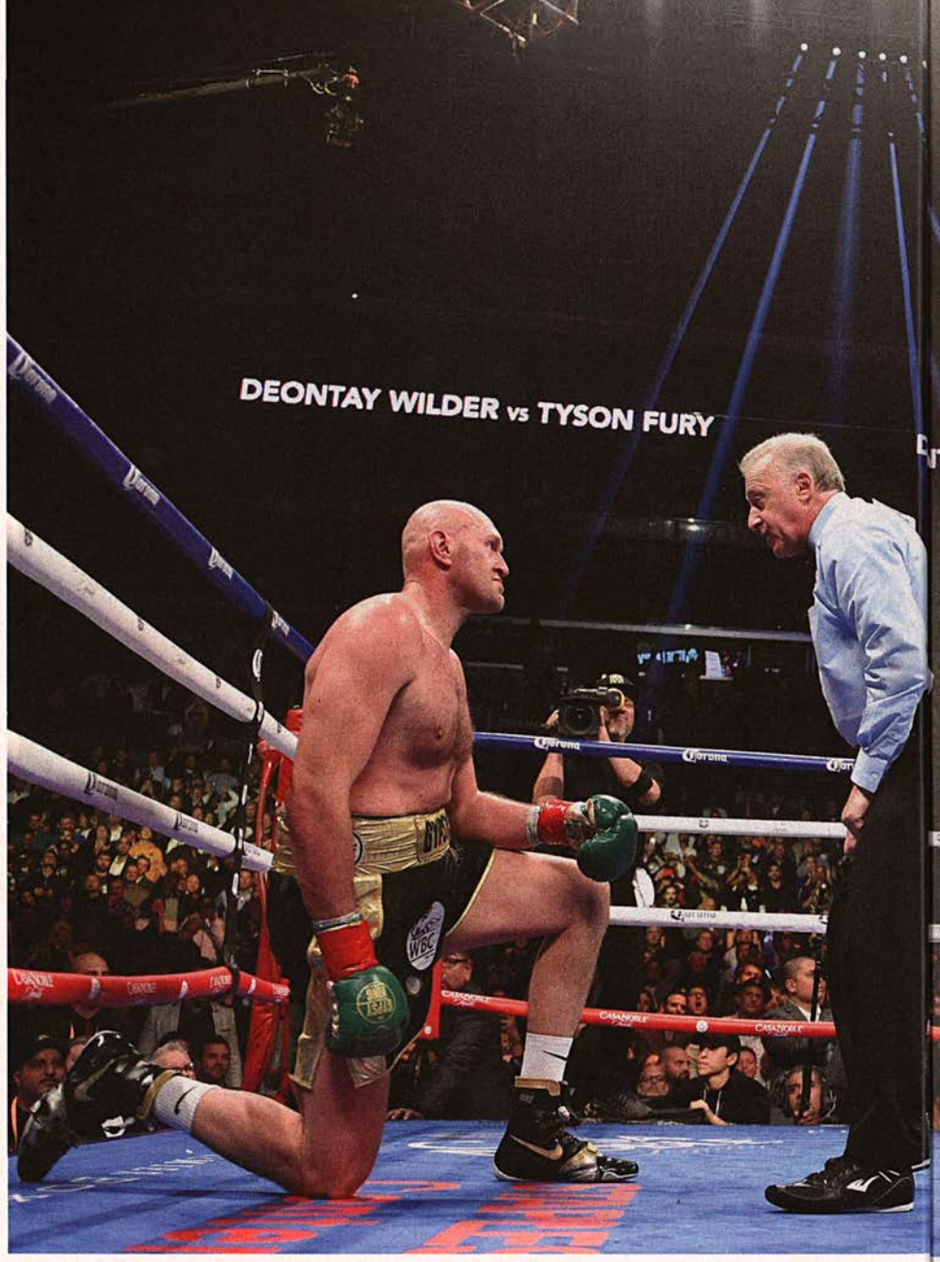
And then, across The Pond, after a 31-month layoff, Fury's improbable resurrection began on June 9, 2018, with an Albanian tune-up by the name of Sefer Seferi in Fury's hometown of Manchester. The victory didn't do much to convince critics he was fighting for anything more than a lucrative payday down the road. Outside of boxing, Fury's weight had soared to more than 400 pounds; slowly he'd been taking it off, yet he took on only one more journeyman (beating Francesco Pianeta unimpressively on points) before signing on to face Wilder at Staples Center in Los Angeles.

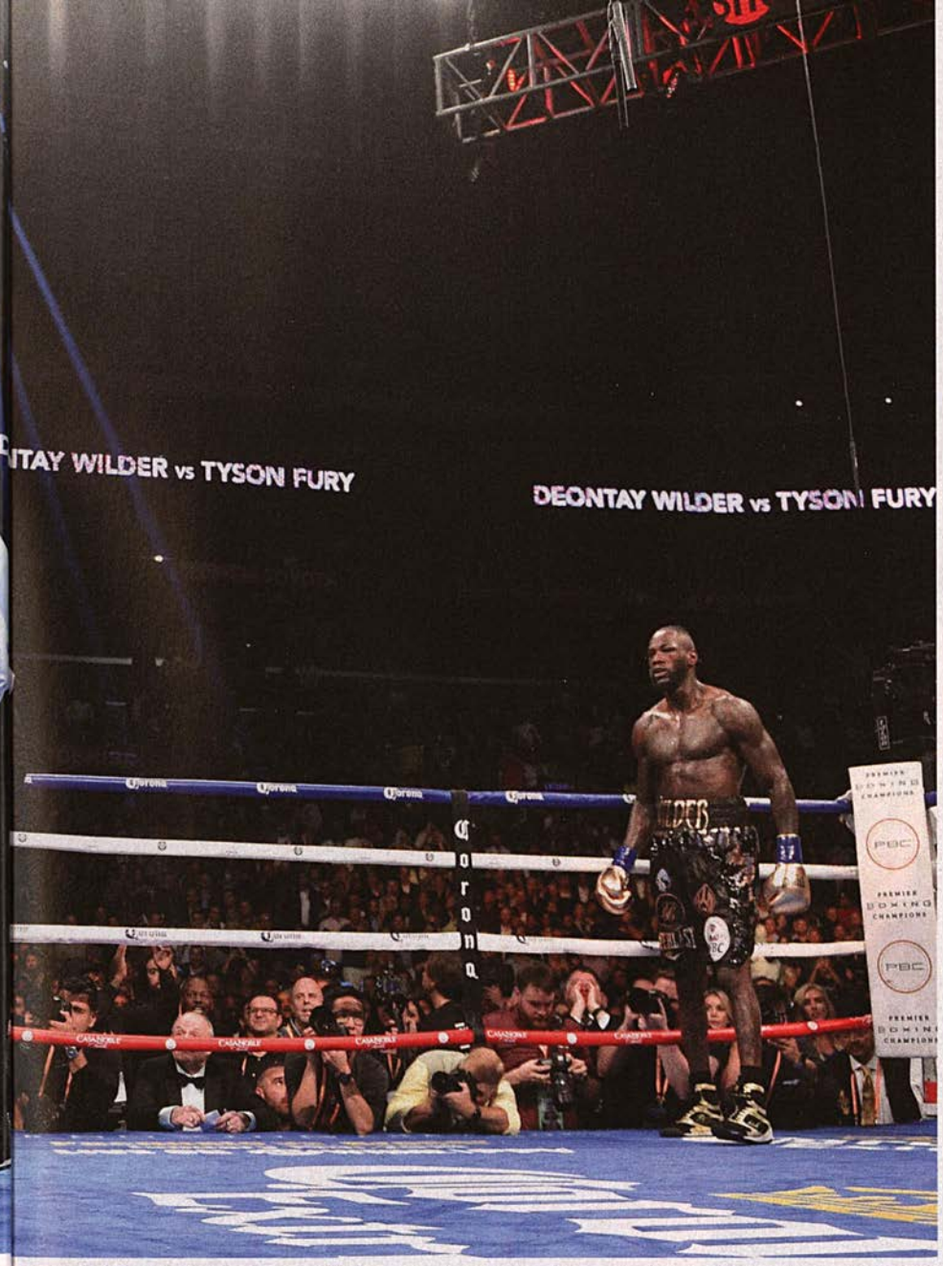
HEAVY LIES THE CROWN

I spent some time with Wilder in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, during his training camp to face Fury. Wilder in private was a soft-spoken and an intensely likable person. Along with a cabal of mostly British journalists, I watched Wilder spar several rounds with the three opponents they could bring in who most closely resembled Fury's unorthodox style and colossal size. Wilder hadn't looked impressive against them. There was immediate consensus among the journalists: We'd never seen anybody with a more dangerous right hand that could instantly end a fight, but if Wilder couldn't land it, he could easily lose every round of the fight if Fury was even a ghost of the fighter who dominated Klitschko. It is not an exaggeration to say that, especially up-close, there are times watching the 6-foot-7, 212-pound Deontay Wilder's foot speed that make the Grill-era George Foreman look like the young Muhammad Ali. I've seen clowns at the circus walking on stilts who maneuver more gracefully. His assistant trainer, Mark Breland, told me without any ego involved that Wilder's technical ability as champion is at about where he himself was at the age of 11. Yet even without much footwork, I have no reservation suggesting that his freight train right hand might be one of the greatest weapons in the history of boxing.

Three important things happened on December 1, 2018, at Staples Center after Wilder and Fury fought. Two of them were relatively predictable; one was a spectacular surprise. Whether or not Fury was living "rent free" in Wilder's head, Fury's superior skills as a boxer embarrassed Wilder and threw meat to his critics. When Wilder was finally able to connect meaningfully with Fury, it laid Fury out on his back and nearly everyone in attendance save the referee wrote off any chance he was capable of getting up. This was underlined by the casual menace of Wilder drawing his fist across his neck executioner-style as he glared at the crowd. And then, nine seconds later, Fury *did* get up. And we saw the look of disbelief on Wilder's face that resembled both Mike Tyson's in Tokyo as he watched Buster Douglas just beating the count in the eighth round or Joe Frazier's in the 15th round after landing a left hook on Muhammad Ali's jaw in 1971's Fight of the Century. Wilder, like Tyson and Frazier before him, suddenly realized the iconic blow he'd landed would less define his own legacy, but instead shower glory on the man who rose from it to fight on. The chilling awe of certain victory had been replaced by a miraculous crucible, all within the brief span of a referee's urgent count toward 10.

From what we've already seen, any combination of Fury, Wilder, and Joshua virtually guarantees dramatic, fan-friendly fights. Fury might well outbox either champion, as he's demonstrated against Klitschko and Wilder. Wilder might make adjustments from his draw against Fury, improve enough to avenge his draw, and close the show against Joshua from what vulnerabilities Klitschko exposed earlier on in their fight. Or Joshua's coronation might await as undisputed champion after dispensing with his rivals for the throne with the determination and firepower he showcased getting off the canvas to vanquish Klitschko with his era-defining victory.





Fury had to settle for a draw after taking Wilder the distance, but he won new fans by dramatically rising from a chilling final-round knockdown.

DIAZ: JOE KLAMAR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; JACOBS: BILL TOMPKINS

And yet, again boxing never missing a chance to shoot itself in the foot, none of these epic fights seem any closer to happening, even with vast fortunes being at stake and immense risks involved with delays and tune-up fights.

"There are three kings right now in the heavyweight division," Kurt Emhoff, boxing manager of several world champions, told me. "One of them, Tyson Fury, has attached himself exclusively with one network – ESPN. The other two are tied to a major player – Anthony Joshua with Matchroom and Deontay Wilder with the PBC – but do not have an exclusive with a network. Any of these fight scenarios between Joshua, Wilder, and Fury can be scuttled by an upset of one of the three. We've seen how Lennox Lewis and Riddick Bowe got cute with negotiating their fight and 'marinating' it. Both men lost at inopportune times and they never fought. Especially with the heavyweight division, results are unpredictable and upsets happen. These fights are ripe right now."

Former HBO Sports executive Evan Rutkowski explains the situation like this: "All of the money in boxing right now is a multifaceted issue with many positives and some negatives. Can the sport get out of its own way? The heavyweight landscape has two landscapes, really. There is the top three and then there's everyone else. Unfortunately for fans who want to see the top three fight each other, the marketplace has been set so high by what Wilder has turned down that it will take building these stars up in the U.S. before they fight each other. That leads to how it could easily fall apart – these guys are great but not infallible. A loss to a heavyweight not in the top three does huge financial damage to any of those fights ... They can really only lose to each other if they want to keep the gravy train running."

Should any of the three champions lose during their "marinating" phase and squander an era of undefeated, charismatic champions on the level of Fury, Wilder, and Joshua, this situation will be one player short of the proverbial four bald men arguing over a comb.

Unified lightweight titleholder Katie Taylor is as humble and affable outside of the ring as she is fierce inside the ropes.

THE THIRD QUEEN

IRELAND'S **KATIE TAYLOR** WILL ATTEMPT TO MAKE HISTORY BY JOINING CECILIA BRAEKHUS AND CLARESSA SHIELDS AS ONE OF BOXING'S THREE UNDISPUTED CHAMPIONS

By **Tom Gray**

"It's a Man's Man's Man's World."

This 1966 song, recorded by the legendary James Brown, had an unapologetically sexist title that was once very appropriate within the world of professional prizefighting. A woman could watch a fight in those days, or maybe punch a ticket for you on the way into an arena. But take part? Hell no! Only men punched for pay.

Not anymore, and what a turnaround this has been.

Before 2019 is half over, the women's game will have three undisputed world champions. Cecilia Braekhus holds all the marbles at welterweight, including the Ring pound-for-pound female champion belt that was presented to "The First Lady" in September 2018 by

WOJTEK URBANEK

Editor-in-Chief Doug Fischer. In April, Claressa "T-Rex" Shields snatched Christina Hammer's WBO title, as well as The Ring's inaugural women's middleweight championship, to solidify her supremacy at 160 pounds. And now all eyes are on the lightweight division.

Katie Taylor, the reigning IBF, WBA and WBO female 135-pound titleholder, will venture to New York to take on WBC counterpart Delfine Persoon on June 1 at Madison Square Garden. This intriguing matchup, which will also have the Ring female lightweight title on the line, is chief support to the long-awaited U.S. debut of unified heavyweight titleholder Anthony Joshua.

The 32-year-old Taylor, a wonderfully charming and humble fighter from the coastal town of Bray in Ireland, turned professional in November 2016 to considerable acclaim and was bursting with ambition. Even so, her career trajectory to this point has exceeded all expectations, and the personable unified titleholder is almost pinching herself in the buildup to the biggest fight of her life.

"I'm delighted with how things have gone," Taylor told The Ring. "I first sat down with (Matchroom promoter) Eddie Hearn two-and-a-half years ago, and I never could have believed the journey would be this exciting. Getting to box in such great venues; it really has gone beyond my wildest imagination.

"I told Eddie that I wanted to be undisputed champion, but to have the opportunity to do it in a few weeks' time is just absolutely amazing."

Taylor (13-0, 6 knockouts) won her first title, the vacant WBA version, in her seventh fight on October 28, 2017. The victim that night was Anahi Esther Sanchez, who was dropped and dominated over 10 rounds. Six months later, the pride of Ireland added the IBF title to her collection with an equally convincing points win over Victoria Noelia Bustos. In three subsequent title defenses, Taylor didn't come close to losing a round, and her popularity soared once again when she wrenched the WBO belt from the previously unbeaten Rose Volante via ninth-round stoppage in March.

The only distinguished lightweight left standing is the 34-year-old Persoon, who has won 43 of 44 fights with 18 KOs. The Belgian veteran snatched the WBC belt from long-reigning titleholder Erica Anabella Farias in April 2014 and has made nine successful defenses over the last five years. However, despite Persoon's huge edge in professional experience, Taylor's legendary amateur resume – she's a 2012 Olympic champion who won everything there was to win in the unpaid ranks – is more than an equalizer.

"Persoon looks very strong, she's got great endurance and she looks quite awkward," offered Taylor. "I think she'll be hard to look good against, and this could be the fight where I have to go into the trenches, dig deep and show a bit of heart. She's very hittable, that's for sure, but she doesn't tire over the 10 rounds and comes at you from funny angles. It's definitely going to be a tough challenge.

"I do believe that Persoon is a fantastic fighter. She hasn't always been in against high-quality opponents, but she has still produced some fantastic performances. I'll have to be better than I was for my last fight, and that's why I'm working so hard. This is the kind of fight that I've always wanted; it's come at the perfect time, and I'm so motivated."

But what would Taylor do for an encore? Undisputed champion after only 14 fights sounds terrific, but the lightweight division would be all but decimated. What dragons are left to slay if Taylor fulfills her dreams at the iconic Madison Square Garden?

"Cecilia (Braekhus) is an incredible example for world boxing, and she has been for years," said Taylor with genuine admiration. "There has been talk about a fight between me and Cecilia if I am victorious on June 1.

"I could definitely move up in weight. I walk around at 140 or 141 pounds, so making weight for the 135-pound division is still quite comfortable for me. But I could definitely move up, and I've already beaten a lot of the fighters at 140. I just want to be involved in big fights."

Taylor's manager, Brian Peters, said that a Braekhus showdown would likely have to take place at a catchweight, but all of that is for the future. Persoon is dangerous. The Belgian pressure-fighter has defeated every opponent she has ever faced, and her one setback (a TKO 4 by Zelda Tekin in November 2010) is pretty much irrelevant because she was a novice pro at that time. The last time this magazine published a women's pound-for-pound list, in April 2018, Persoon was No. 2 behind Braekhus.

The Ring female lightweight championship will be at stake for the first time ever in this fight, and that speaks volumes about the quality of the matchup. And that piece of history was not lost on the pre-fight favorite.

"It's the pinnacle," said Taylor, her excitement visceral. "The Ring title represents the champion of champions in each division. To fight for it is truly an honor. Just looking back at all the champions who have held that title – Jack Dempsey being the first – it's an incredible feeling.

"It's amazing how far the women's game has come, and it's satisfying to be in this position. This is where women's boxing should be. We're getting the chance to perform on these big shows, live on TV, and the right fights are being made."

With Aleksandr Usyk formally relinquishing his WBA cruiserweight title in March, there is not one single undisputed male champion in the sport of boxing. Not one in 17 divisions. Promotional bickering, network allegiances and politics to one side, the powers that be would do well to follow the women's lead and make the fights that fans want to see.

Right now, it's the ladies who are setting the example.

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for The Ring and a member of the ratings panel. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

THE TRUTH HURTS

OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK WAS ON THE PUNCHING SIDE OF A TRAGEDY WHEN ADONIS STEVENSON SUFFERED BRAIN DAMAGE DURING THEIR FIGHT LAST YEAR, BUT HE'S NOT LETTING BOXING'S TOUGHEST REALITY DERAIL HIS AMBITIONS

By **Ron Borges**

Boxing is the most elemental brand of hand-to-hand combat, and in combat there are always casualties. People often don't see the true extent of the damage fighters suffer, however, because they are mostly shielded from the post-fight trauma and pain, unaware that each time a boxer leaves the ring, he leaves a piece of himself behind. This is mostly true whether he wins or loses, especially once he moves from prospect to contender or champion.

But sometimes, thankfully not often, that damage is so severe that there is no hiding its consequences for the fallen warrior. So it was with former light heavyweight champion Adonis Stevenson last December in Quebec City, when he was stopped by Oleksandr Gvozdyk in the 11th round of what would come to be Stevenson's final fight.

(Above) Gvozdyk brutally ended his 175-pound title bout against Stevenson in the 11th round, with tragic results, but was back in the ring four months later (left) to stop Doudou Ngumbu.

At 41, Stevenson had held the WBC title for five-and-a-half years, successfully defending it nine times. The athletic southpaw was a feared puncher who had to be respected at all times because he could turn around a fight with one left-hand bomb, a punch that often carried concussive force.

On that night, Stevenson led by a wide margin on one card, by a slight margin on a second and was all even on the third, but Gvozdyk had already dropped him once in the third round (although the referee erroneously ruled it a slip). The challenger was 10 years younger, fresher and following a specific battle plan created by his new trainer, Teddy Atlas. Time, they believed, was on their side.

The plan involved discipline and a guerilla warrior's approach to combat. The idea was to wear down Stevenson while being conscious of avoiding the champion's withering armaments, particularly that left hand, until Gvozdyk could do what both had come to the Centre Videotron to do, which was get the other man in trouble.

Gvozdyk succeeded, stopping Stevenson with a six-punch flurry in Round 11 that ended with a thunderous right hand, snapping the champion's head back as his body went limp. Referee Michael Griffin leapt in and stopped the bout as Stevenson collapsed on his hands and knees, his mind clouded and his eyes unseeing. Gvozdyk had done his job, but the outcome this time resulted in more than victory. This time, more than a championship was lost. A man nearly was as well.

After the fight, Stevenson was rushed to a local hospital, suffering from acute head trauma that necessitated being put into a medically induced coma to reduce swelling on the brain. As Stevenson lay fighting for his life, Gvozdyk had become a champion without room for celebration.

It is natural to focus on the fallen warrior in such a moment, our concerns primarily with him. Stevenson has reportedly regained about 80 percent of functionality and is presently working at a Canadian rehabilitation center near his Montreal home to improve his condition. Although he will never box again, he is speaking and walking. His long-term future remains unclear, but he fights on in a different arena, reclaiming new parts of his life each day.

But what of the warrior who remained standing that December night? What of the boxer who fulfilled his dream but then was unable to glory fully in the moment because of his opponent's wounds? What of Oleksandr Gvozdyk?

On March 30, he returned to the ring to make his first defense of the WBC light heavyweight title. An earnest practitioner and an honest man, Gvozdyk understood some

MIKEY WILLIAMS

would wonder how he could ever step in the ring again to do the job he and his opponent are contracted to perform.

It is no misnomer to say boxing is "the hurt business." There is pain enough for two in every fight. After all, that is really the aim of it on the professional level. The theory may be to hit and not be hit, but the best description of a boxer's job was delivered by the greatest boxer there ever was, Sugar Ray Robinson, at an inquest in Cleveland following the death of a fighter named Jimmy Doyle. Doyle had died 17 hours after Robinson knocked him unconscious.

Coroner Samuel Gerber asked Robinson, "Did you intend to get Doyle in trouble?" Robinson replied, "Mister, it's my job to get him in trouble."

It is a boxer's reality. They ply their trade in the most truthful work environment in sports. Inside those ropes, there is no room for lying to yourself. Boxers understand the risk.

So for Gvozdyk, there was no room to hide from the truth. The fighter must accept his fate, whatever it is, and then make a choice. After Stevenson, was he fully willing to accept those risks again?

How can he fight on after praying many nights for Stevenson's recovery? How can he still be true to the dark art both had chosen? The only way was to tell the real truth of it.

"It wasn't pleasant, this thing, but I don't want to be a hypocrite and say I couldn't sleep. I don't want to hurt him like that, but he would have done the same. I could have been in his place. It can happen to anyone," Gvozdyk said a week before he would successfully defend his title against Doudou Ngumbu, four months after the Stevenson fight.

"Some people have been critical of the referee. They say, 'One punch too much. He should have stopped it.' But if he did, then they would say he stopped it too soon. He did his job the best he could. I did my job the same.

"No boxer wants another boxer to be hurt like that. We want to win, but we don't want that. But we know the risk we take."

To some that may sound harsh or cold, but it is not. Gvozdyk spoke with compassion about Stevenson and his family and posted a video wishing them well after the fight. But it is undeniable that Stevenson came forward many times when his opponents were hurt, not to brutalize them but simply to win. It is how he knocked out 24 of his 32 opponents in a career that brought him his dream at the expense of other men's.

Now Gvozdyk had reached his, but the ability to celebrate was muted because, you see, in the boxing ring there is seldom only one casualty. Most often there are two. Are you not slightly wounded too at the sight of such a thing?

"It was the achievement of my life, but there is a saying in Russian," said Gvozdyk, who was born in Ukraine and now lives in California. "A spoonful of dirt in a barrel of honey."

When his training camp reopened in February to prepare for Ngumbu, Atlas kept a close eye on Gvozdyk, for it is one thing to say you have processed what happened in Quebec City and quite another to have actually done it. One can say "we all know the risk," but after living out one side of that risk – the survivor's side few think about – it is quite another to cope with it.

So Atlas watched closely at first, understanding that some boxers are never the same after injuring another man beyond what you ever anticipated. He was looking for shadows. Searching for doubts. Watching to see if his fighter was still a fighter.

"We watched the fight first thing," Atlas said. "I was watching him to see how he was reacting. He saw when he got caught solid by Stevenson with a left hand in the 10th round. He said, 'He hurt me. That was a mistake.' We watched the end. He didn't say much.

"Ever since I met Alex, I've been impressed by his mental strength. If you're going to continue doing this, you've got to continue doing it or you're not a fighter any more. There's no safe middle ground. When you tie your boxing shoes up, you know why you tied them up. They're boxing shoes, not shoes to go dancing. They're boxing shoes. So go do your job.

"You're going to get into that ring and practice for eight weeks to find a way for him not to get to you so you can get to him. Then you embrace when it's over and you both know why.

"In the ring, your job is to hurt somebody. Then, at the end of the day, you embrace each other in an honest moment of respect. They have what they've just been through and survived. They know what could have happened. If that night comes where you can't embrace one another because one has been damaged too much, how do you prepare for that? You feel the same feelings of when you hugged those other fighters. You realize it could be you. At the same time, you wish it had been like all the other nights. But you can't change it.

"After the fight, he came to my house and one of his arms was purple. It was from Stevenson's punches. All up his bicep. Purple. You know what he said? He said, 'I'm glad he didn't hit me here,' and he pointed to his chin. That's all he had to say. He's cold in that ring. He keeps his concentration. He kept it in the Stevenson fight even though his arm hurt. Even though he was behind. Under duress, he stayed calm.

"He understands what fighters understand. The other guy is going to try and do it to us. That's the common denominator in boxing. It's why there's a reason for those embraces. It's not exchanging jerseys after a game like guys in other sports. It's partly relief. 'We got here.' When one doesn't, you know that's why you embraced all those other guys. And that's it.

"That's not cold. It's reality in this business. You go and say a private prayer and hope he gets better. Then you prepare to go into it again. If we get a chance to get the guy, we go get him. That's our obligation. It's the other guy's too. We both know that. Alex has been through a lot of hard things. This is another hard thing he's found a way to get through."

MIKEY WILLIAMS

Gvozdyk and trainer Teddy Atlas have created a bond built on trust and an understanding of purpose.

Those hard things began when Gvozdyk was growing up in Ukraine. He was a boy when it gained its independence from Russia during the Soviet collapse, a turbulent time where the GDP lost 60 percent and five-figure inflation crushed most citizens. Crime and corruption abounded. Life was difficult, which is one reason the country became the spawning ground for world-class fighters. Hard times are where fighters are born.

At 10, Gvozdyk was a fan of Bruce Lee movies and ended up going with a friend to a kickboxing gym. He soon gravitated to boxing, but not to become a boxer.

"I just wanted to be tougher and more confident," he recalled. "If people know you're in the boxing school, you're automatically the toughest (kid)."

Gvozdyk went to the gym alone, and when he returned home and told his family, "There was big drama with my grandmother and mother." His grandfather warned him: The first time he got hit in the nose, he'd run home. He didn't.

"The first four years, it wasn't systematic," he recalled. "I came by myself and I trained by myself. Fifty percent of the time I was training, fifty percent I was a kid. But at 15, I realized training like that you won't be successful."

It would be seven more years before he became Ukrainian national champion, a victory that allowed him

to quit an all-night job as a bouncer because the government paid him a small stipend to focus on boxing. It paid off.

"That was the turning point," he said. "Maybe that was the first time I thought of myself as a boxer."

Gvozdyk would win three national championships, go 9-0 in the World Series of Boxing fighting for Dynamo Moscow and win the bronze medal at the 2012 Olympics in a controversial fight that ended in a draw but was lost on what is called "countbacks." Others called it robbery.

By then, he was 25 but still had no thoughts of turning pro. He won his final amateur tournament the following year, not long after his friend Vasiliy Lomachenko signed professionally with Bob Arum. A light went on.

"Until three months before I signed, I never thought I'd be a professional," Gvozdyk said. "I was close with Lomachenko. When he turned pro, I thought, 'Why not try?'"

He moved to Southern California and began training in the gym of Robert Garcia. The transitions from amateur to pro and Ukraine to Southern California were difficult but "interesting."

"I like to discover something new," Gvozdyk said. "I never felt like an alien."

Within two years, he would knock out former contender Nadjib Mohammedi at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, and within four win the interim WBC light heavyweight title by unanimous decision over Mehdi Amar. But with a championship showdown against Stevenson looming, he felt an unease about his growth as a fighter, a discomfort that led him to Atlas, who had stopped training fighters after the retirement of Timothy Bradley.

Atlas had been an ESPN boxing analyst for more than 20 years but had grown weary of boxing's often shady business side. He had success with Bradley but had come out of retirement as a trainer to do it, and he had no interest in rekindling that part of his boxing life for any fighter.

"I'd lost faith in the business," Atlas said.

Still, he agreed to spend two days with Gvozdyk at the insistence of his children, who told him he was essentially a teacher refusing to use his gift, and that was a waste. Atlas has long been one of boxing's most outspoken critics, a truth-teller in a world of half-truths, so Gvozdyk was cautioned not to hire him. But his manager, Egis Klimas, believed Atlas could help him, and soon the fighter felt the same. The problem was convincing the trainer.

"It was really difficult at first," Gvozdyk said. "Teddy's style was different, but that was the least of the difficult part. I felt like a rookie the first time I was in the gym with him.

"I used to just work a lot and not think about what we were doing or why. He stopped sparring a lot to explain what I'd done wrong. He demanded I concentrate from the first minute to the last. He's a tyrant. But he's a smart tyrant.

"If you want to get something new, you have to listen and be open to it. A lot of people told me it was a mistake to change trainers before the biggest fight of my life, but the crucial thing was I trusted him."

The question at first was whether Atlas would trust Gvozdyk and their sport.

After a few days together, Gvozdyk drove Atlas back to the airport for his return to New York. He did not yet know if he had a trainer or not, and the Stevenson fight was barely three months away. So Gvozdyk decided to do what fighters must. He came forward.

STEVE MARCUS

Gvozdyk accepts the violent nature of pro boxing. He had to get up from a knockdown to stop Tommy Karpency in the sixth round of their 2016 bout.

"I'd told my old trainer we were no longer working together," Gvozdyk recalled. "If Teddy said no, I'd be in trouble. I tried to be honest that first day.

"I told (Teddy), 'I know your temper. If you want to scream at me and I deserve it, no problem, but I don't want to be called a piece of shit for no reason.' He was quiet. He listened to me. He looked at me and said, 'Thank you. It's insulting, but thank you.' I told him if he trained me he'd never regret it."

Two anxious weeks went by before the answer came. Atlas called to say, 'Let's go to work.'"

"I thought I could help him," Atlas said. "I knew Stevenson was a dangerous fight. You had to fight him with a disciplined approach. I had no idea if I could get him to do that. I didn't know if he was coachable enough. But if he was, he could win.

"My next thought was I don't want to do this no more. I'd locked the door after Bradley. Alex unlocked it. You could see he's a humble kid. He can put his ego in his pocket. He wants to be great. He allowed me to trust the sport again. I have to be thankful for that."

In the Ngumbu fight, Gvozdyk (17-0, 14 KOs) was in total control but too often hesitant against an awkward opponent. He was landing, but not as often as Atlas thought he should, when Ngumbu suddenly quit in the fifth round complaining of an ankle injury that seemed to coincide with the champion nailing him with a hard right to the head. Later it would be learned that Ngumbu had torn a calf ligament.

The titleholder was reportedly less than pleased with his performance, believing he gave Ngumbu more respect than he should have. Who knows the reason for that? No one yet, but inside the ring boxing is the sport of truth. Whether the man they call "Nail" is still willing to swing his hammer with the same authority he did against Stevenson will become clear either in a unification fight with one of the other beltholders or in a mandatory defense against a mouthy kid from Staten Island (Atlas' hometown) named Marcus Browne.

Browne (23-0, 16 KOs) is coming off a victory over Badou Jack and apparently wants the Gvozdyk matchup. He seems to have taken Atlas' presence in Gvozdyk's corner personally, because it was in gyms sponsored by Atlas' charitable foundation that Browne first found his calling.

If that eventually leads Browne to call on Gvozdyk, Atlas' loyalties will not be conflicted, and neither will his belief in the fighter who brought him back to boxing.

"To train someone for eight weeks, he has to be someone you want to be around," Atlas said. "He understands what the process of learning is. A teacher can only teach someone who wants to be taught. He's searching for things all the time. He's the most intelligent fighter I ever trained. He's mentally very strong. I think he can become the best light heavyweight in the world."

To do that, Oleksandr Gvozdyk knows he must take risks. More risks, frankly, than he did against Ngumbu. The kind of risks that lead boxers to embrace when the fighting is done.

ALI, LOUIS AND THE WAR OF WORDS

BEING CHAMPIONS FROM DIFFERENT ERAS DIDN'T PREVENT **MUHAMMAD ALI** AND **JOE LOUIS** FROM TAKING SHOTS AT EACH OTHER

By **Don Stradley**

During Muhammad Ali's first title reign, as he easily disposed of one challenger after another, it was common for sportswriters to wonder how he would fare against the legendary heavyweights of the past. In fact, these hypothetical matchups were a national obsession. The fighter most often brought up was Joe Louis, who had vacated the title in 1949 when Ali was still a kid in Louisville, Kentucky. Boxing buffs worked themselves into a lather trying to decide between Ali, the swift-dancing master, and Louis, arguably history's most devastating puncher. The pundits, most of them coming of age in Louis' era, usually picked the humble wartime champ over the brash Ali. Since the topic wouldn't go away, even Ali and Louis were drawn into the conversation. They were polite at first, even friendly, but what ultimately emerged was a battle of words that took place on television, in newspapers and even within the pages of The Ring.

Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali served as heroes for their respective generations, which may explain why they didn't see eye-to-eye during Ali's heyday.

INSET: AP/NICK POTTS

Louis and Ali clearly knew what they represented. Though cases could certainly be made for others, they were the two most important fighters of their century. That's why television producers and magazine editors gave them platforms where they could trade barbs. With neither man conceding an inch to the other and the dialogue occasionally turning hostile, they created a kind of cultural, cross-generational dynamite.

The first rumbling came in February 1964 when Louis visited Miami's 5th Street Gym, where Ali was training to fight champion Sonny Liston. Louis told the press that Ali, still known as Cassius Clay, couldn't punch and that Liston "will kill him." Louis may have had a motive in that he was a friend of Liston with plans to promote him. Still, Louis was impressed when Ali defeated Liston by a seventh-round TKO and won the title. "Even Joe Louis told me I did a good job," Ali crowed to the United Press. "And you know how great he was. It takes one to know one."

The two remained on good terms for the next several months. Ali revered the older man, and Louis seemed amused by Ali. However, Ali's teasing nature was irrepressible. When they appeared together on a television show in early 1966, the focus turned to which was the better fighter. Ali asked, "Do you think you would've stood a chance with me?" Louis, calm as a stone, recalled his infamous Bum of the Month tour.

Ali's eyes widened. "I would've been a bum compared to you?"

"You'd have been on the tour," Louis said.

On another occasion, Ali claimed he'd had a dream where he knocked Louis out. Louis scowled and said, "Don't even dream it."

The playful banter turned sour prior to Ali's March '66 bout with George Chuvalo. Ali had employed Louis as an adviser, but Louis' attempts to guide Ali were ignored. The reality was that Ali had hired the financially strapped Louis out of generosity but had no intention

of listening to him. Louis fumed. He complained to the Associated Press about Ali's "big mouth" and added, "It'd be a good thing for boxing if he got beaten." In a somewhat shocking move, Louis left Ali and joined Chuvalo's camp. When Ali won a 15-round decision, Louis wrote a column for a Canadian news syndicate where he praised both fighters. He finished by saying, "I wish, though, that I was fighting Cassius Clay."

Louis appeared to patch things up with Ali but, like many Americans, he wasn't pleased with Ali's personal life. He disapproved when Ali joined the Nation of Islam and continued for years to call him "Clay." He was also disappointed by Ali's position against the war in Vietnam. Louis had volunteered for Army duty during World War II, and he didn't agree with or understand Ali's anti-war stance. When Louis voiced his displeasure, Ali struck back with the same insult he'd used on Floyd Patterson, Ernie Terrell, and later Joe Frazier – he called him an "Uncle Tom," a white man's champion.

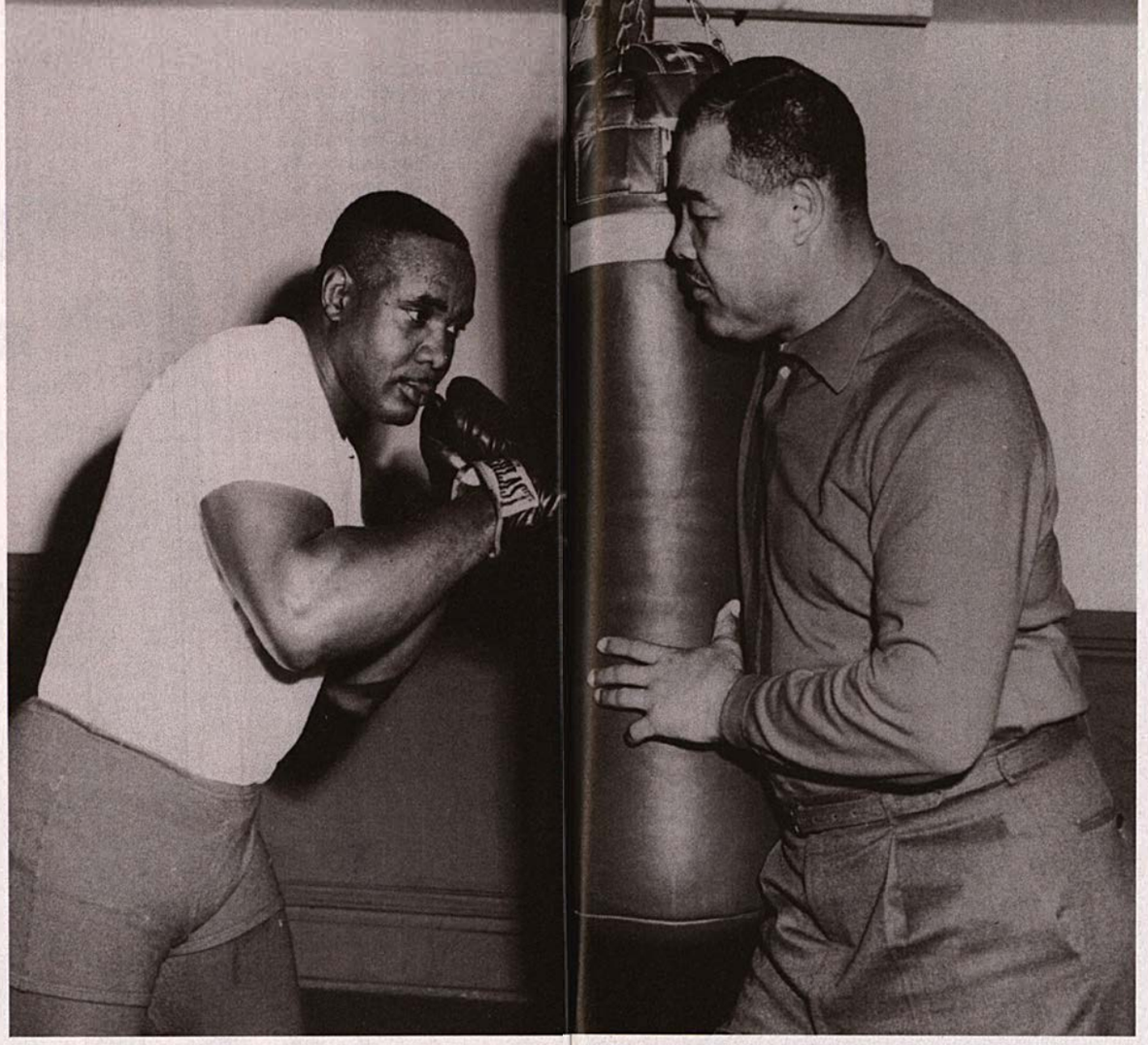
Louis raised the stakes in a story that appeared in newspapers and in the February 1967 issue of The Ring. In a piece called "How I Would Have Clobbered Clay," the 52-year-old former champion railed at the reigning heavyweight king. "(Clay has) a million dollars worth of confidence and a dime's worth of courage," Louis said. In the article, which was "as told to" George Whiting of the London Evening Standard, Louis dismissed Ali as soft-punching and weak-chinned. Though Whiting applied some polish to Louis' prose, the bit where Louis talks boxing sounds as if it came directly from his mouth: "'I could have whipped him... I'd press him, bang him around, claw him, clobber him with all I'd got, cut down his speed, belt him around the ribs. I'd punish the body, where the pain comes real bad." Louis ended the story on a respectful note and called Ali "a nice boy and a smart fighter," but there was no mistaking what he really thought of boxing's biggest star.

In a subsequent Ring article titled "Louis Clobber Me? He Must Be Joking," Ali rebutted by saying Louis was simply too slow. The story wasn't solely about Louis, however, as Ali touched on many subjects. Regardless, The Ring knew that the heat between Ali and Louis was good for sales and presented the feature as if it centered on their ongoing feud.

Though Louis and Ali would occasionally pose together for photos, and Ali tended to be playful in his taunts, Louis' article remained hot for several months. Reporters quoted it religiously, particularly Louis' comment about Ali's lack of courage. No matter what Ali did, it seemed Louis was always observing him like a somber judge. After his victory over Terrell, ABC's Howard Cosell told Ali that Louis had finally proclaimed him a great fighter. Ali shrugged, "I don't care what he said."

Louis' name came up again in a.k.a. Cassius Clay, a 1970 documentary produced during Ali's exile from boxing. In a spirited exchange with trainer Cus D'Amato, Ali ridiculed Louis as "slow-moving" and mocked Louis' opponents as unworthy. "He may be able to hit hard," said Ali, "but it means nothing if he can't find nothing to hit." As he watched an old reel of Louis battering an opponent, Ali only sneered. "This is a different day," Ali said.

Indeed it was. And that, perhaps, was the problem. Louis had been a hero of the 1930s and '40s, while



Louis was a good friend of Sonny Liston, who was dethroned by Ali as heavyweight champ.

Ali embodied the 1960s. As much as it was a style clash, it was a generational clash, a clatter of ideologies that mirrored what was going on around the country. Louis' son, Joe Louis Barrow Jr., said that his dad appreciated Ali for the way he invigorated boxing. But as Barrow told Ali biographer Thomas Hauser, "There were times when there was bad feeling between Muhammad and my father."

Fighters of different generations have taken verbal jabs at each other in more recent times, usually via social media. Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Sugar Ray Leonard have exchanged unpleasantries, as have Deontay Wilder and Mike Tyson. Sometimes it's amusing. Sometimes not. It's certainly nothing new. Since bareknuckle times, older fighters have often been harsh critics of those who came after, as if they're still trying to land one last knockout punch, albeit from the safety of retirement. Even Louis heard his share of comments in his younger days, none louder or more grating than those from the gold-plated mouth of Jack Johnson.

During Louis' heyday, Johnson often went public with negative remarks about Louis' style. He also insisted that Louis couldn't have beaten the fighters of 30 years earlier – when Johnson had been the world's top heavyweight. When Max Schmeling scored his dramatic knockout of Louis in 1936, he credited Johnson with pointing out the flaws in Louis' form. (The night of Schmeling's victory, Johnson strutted through Harlem flashing the wad of money he'd made by betting against Louis; he was reportedly attacked by a group of Louis' fans.) As late as 1946, when Louis had been champion for nearly a decade, Johnson told The Ring's Nat Fleischer, "I still think Louis' stance is all wrong."

Johnson didn't start out as Louis' nemesis. He'd originally wanted to be part of Louis' circle, but Louis' management team of John Roxborough and Julian Black, plus trainer Jack Blackburn, didn't want the controversial Johnson anywhere near their fighter. Insulted, Johnson assigned himself the role of Louis' most relentless critic. Johnson sometimes gave Louis his due, but not often. He once derided Louis to columnist John Lardner by saying, "He can't take a punch very good, he ain't bright, and his footwork is terrible." Johnson called Louis' footwork "the muffle shuffle."

In 1941, Johnson accepted an offer to train challenger Abe Simon for his shot at Louis' title. Whether he thought Simon had a legitimate chance or he just saw it as another way to antagonize Louis, Johnson spent days giving Simon pointers. Nothing helped. Louis stopped Simon in the 13th round. Twenty-five years later, when Louis joined Chuvalo's team against Ali, the similarities were glaring. Did Louis realize history was repeating itself?

Though Johnson denied that he was jealous of Louis, he'd surely taken note of Louis' success. Having been the first black heavyweight champion, Johnson may have felt he deserved some credit for paving the way for Louis. Kudos weren't forthcoming, though, and Louis' admirers viewed Johnson as a cranky old-timer. Louis rarely said anything in public about Johnson, but on the occasions when Johnson arrived unannounced at his training headquarters, Louis wouldn't start sparring until Johnson was asked to leave. All told, Louis' connection to Johnson was even thornier than his relationship with Ali.

By the 1970s, Ali had become the most recognized athlete on the planet, while Louis sank back into the shadows, waylaid by health problems. By then, Ali had softened his approach concerning Louis. Even when Louis said he'd blast right through Ali's new "rope-a-dope" tactic, Ali humbly responded, "He probably could." The rivalry, if it had been real in the first place, appeared to be over. When Louis died in 1981, Ali was a pallbearer at the funeral.

Ali's friend Gene Kilroy once told a story that put the two fighters into an interesting perspective. It was about the time Ali visited a nursing home to spend an afternoon with the ill and elderly. One old man sat up in his bed and stared at Ali in disbelief. The nurse asked, "Do you know who this is?" The old man said, "Oh my God! It's Joe Louis!" Ali played along and gave the man a hug. "That's right," Ali said, "I'm Joe Louis." Later, Ali said it was nice for the old fellow to think he had met his idol.

Despite differences in style and temperament, Ali and Louis were similar in the way their impact on society went beyond sports. They were both giants. Predictably, they also suffered from gigantic insecurities. It's likely that each possessed a measure of dread at being overshadowed by the other. Maybe their competitive natures made them feel there was room for only one giant.

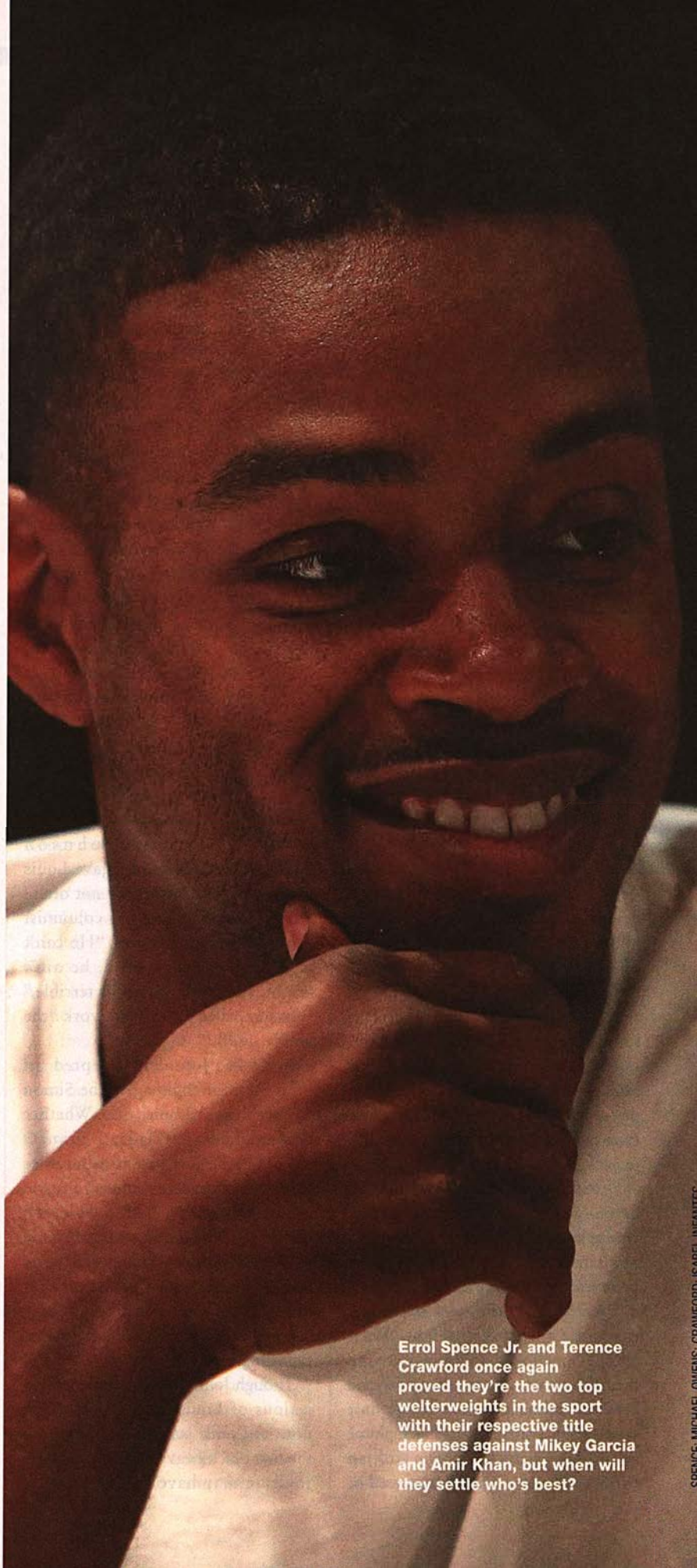
If so, they were wrong. There's always room for more giants. In America, we need as many as we can get.

THE WELTER WAIT

A POTENTIAL CLASSIC LOOMS IN **ERROL SPENCE JR.** VS. **TERENCE CRAWFORD**, BUT DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH FOR THOSE TICKETS

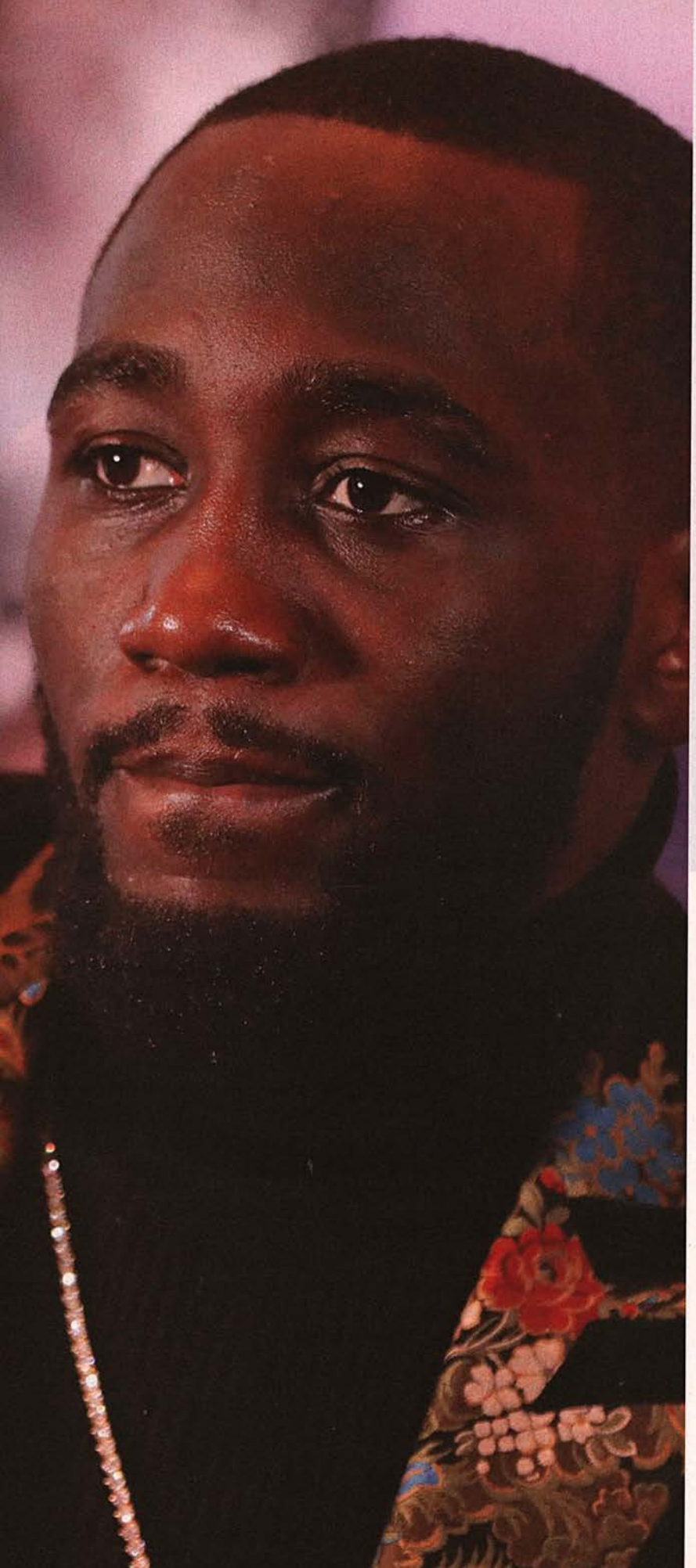
By **Michael Montero**

Regardless of where you rank them, you probably see Errol Spence Jr. and Terence Crawford as the two best welterweights in the world. You likely have them on your pound-for-pound list as well, just as The Ring does. Both fighters are undefeated, in their physical prime and proven commercial draws in their hometowns. The prospect of a future Crawford-Spence bout not only has fight fans salivating, it has boxing historians eager to add another chapter to a familiar book. For well over a century, the welterweight division has delivered some of the most meaningful and memorable fights that grew into legends. Walker-Britton, Ross-McLarnin, Armstrong-Ross, Basilio-DeMarco, Robinson-Gavilan, Napoles-Griffith – the list goes on. Sometimes the powers that be in boxing actually listen to the fans and make the fights they want, when they want them. Other times, well, not so much. As is the case with all things in life, some matchups live up to the hype and others don't. Here are some recent examples.



Errol Spence Jr. and Terence Crawford once again proved they're the two top welterweights in the sport with their respective title defenses against Mikey Garcia and Amir Khan, but when will they settle who's best?

SPENCE: MICHAEL OWENS-CRAWFORD: ISABEL INFANTES

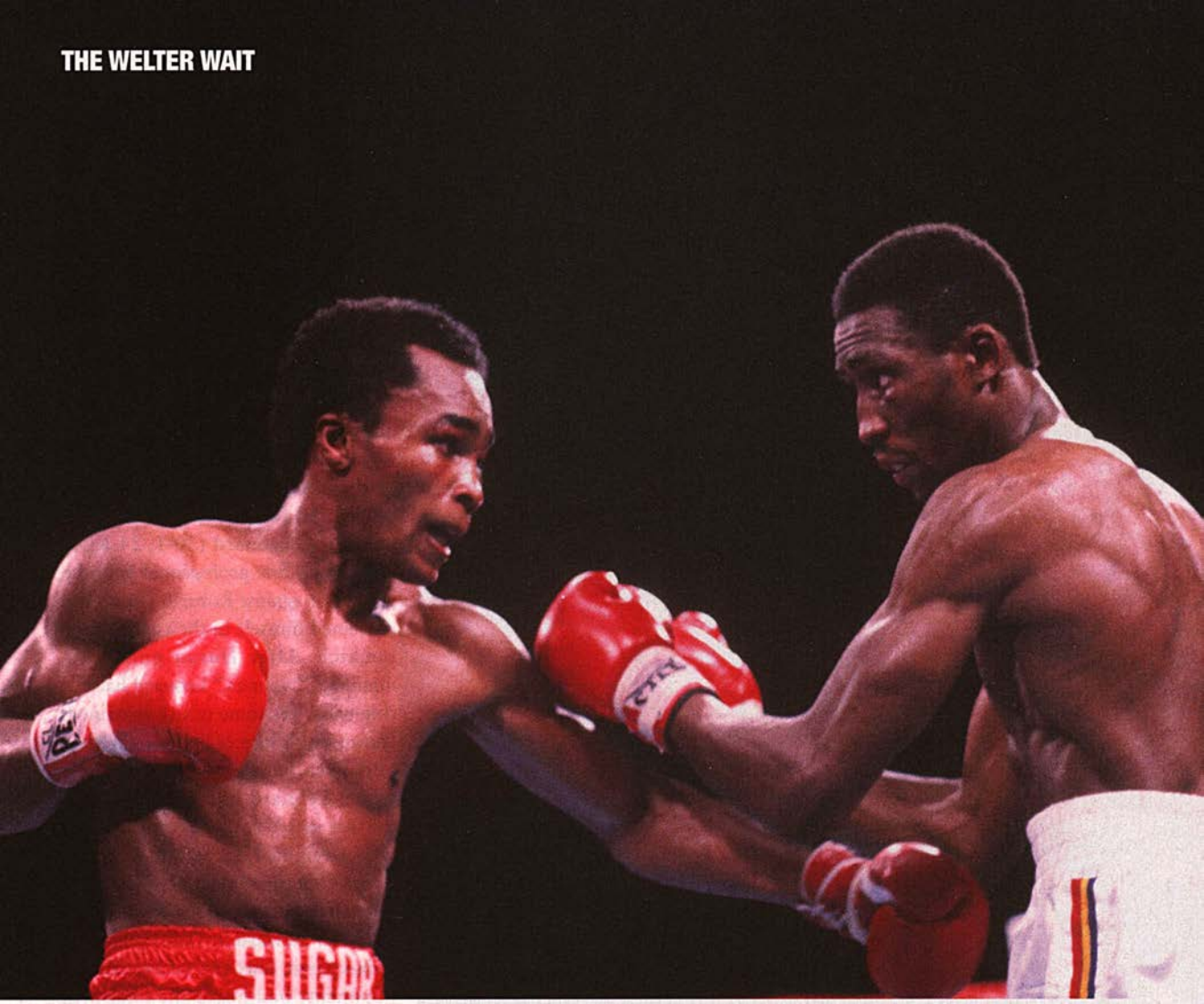


THE GREAT:

On September 16, 1981, at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, "Sugar" Ray Leonard put his Ring/WBC welterweight championship on the line against undefeated WBA titlist Thomas "Hitman" Hearns. The eagerly anticipated matchup would unify the division (the IBF and WBO would not come around until later in the decade) and determine the top pound-for-pound fighter in all of boxing. Leonard (30-1, 21 KOs) had lost his first professional bout the year prior against Roberto Duran but redeemed himself in their immediate rematch. After Duran pulled his infamous "No mas," Leonard had his title back, yet some critics remained. Duran was a former lightweight, they said. Even the great Wilfred Benitez, whom Leonard had beaten to win the title in 1979, was a former junior welterweight. Hearns was a bigger, stronger, natural welterweight with feared power. Molded by trainer Emanuel Steward in Detroit's famed Kronk Gym, only two of Hearns' 32 opponents had heard the final bell. The public clamored for a Hearns vs. Leonard fight, and the fighters heeded the call. No stalling, no marinating, no milking of their titles. Consider this: The big fight took place when both men were in their 20s and had a combined record of 62-1 (51 KOs). Best of all, the fight more than delivered. Leonard was down on all three scorecards when he stopped Hearns in the 14th round of what would become the 1981 Ring Fight of the Year. There were no losers on this night. Both men went on to have iconic Hall of Fame careers that fans still marvel over decades later.

THE NOT SO GREAT:

On September 10, 1993, Julio Cesar Chavez (87-0, 72 KOs) and Pernell Whitaker (32-1, 15 KOs) fought at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas. They entered the bout ranked as the No. 1 and No. 2 fighters in the world pound-for-pound



by The Ring. Although they had spent the bulk of their careers at lightweight and junior welterweight, Whitaker had moved up to welterweight early that year and beat James "Buddy" McGirt for his WBC welterweight title. Unbeknownst to him, the fight with Chavez had already been negotiated by his management. It was decided that should Whitaker beat McGirt, Chavez would move up to challenge him for his new belt with one stipulation: The Mexican superstar demanded a 145-pound catchweight. Anticipation for the bout was sky-high. Over 65,000 fans packed the Alamodome with hundreds of media representatives from around the world. Unfortunately they would all witness a one-sided bout end in controversy. After 12 rounds in which the champion appeared to clearly do the better work, judges Mickey Vann and Franz Marti turned in 115-115 scorecards to overrule Jack Woodruff's 115-113 Whitaker score, and the bout was declared a majority draw. Every fight fan from that era remembers the subsequent issue of Sports Illustrated magazine with the "Robbed!" headline on the cover. Team Chavez knew they had narrowly escaped and wanted no part of a rematch with "Sweet Pea." It was not the first time a high-profile bout with "JC" concluded in high drama. Three years earlier in Las Vegas, Chavez was well behind when he dropped Meldrick Taylor in the final round of their junior welterweight championship bout. Taylor made it to his feet, but referee Richard Steele stopped the fight with only two seconds remaining. That prior history made the dubious Whitaker-Chavez draw that much harder for fight fans to swallow.

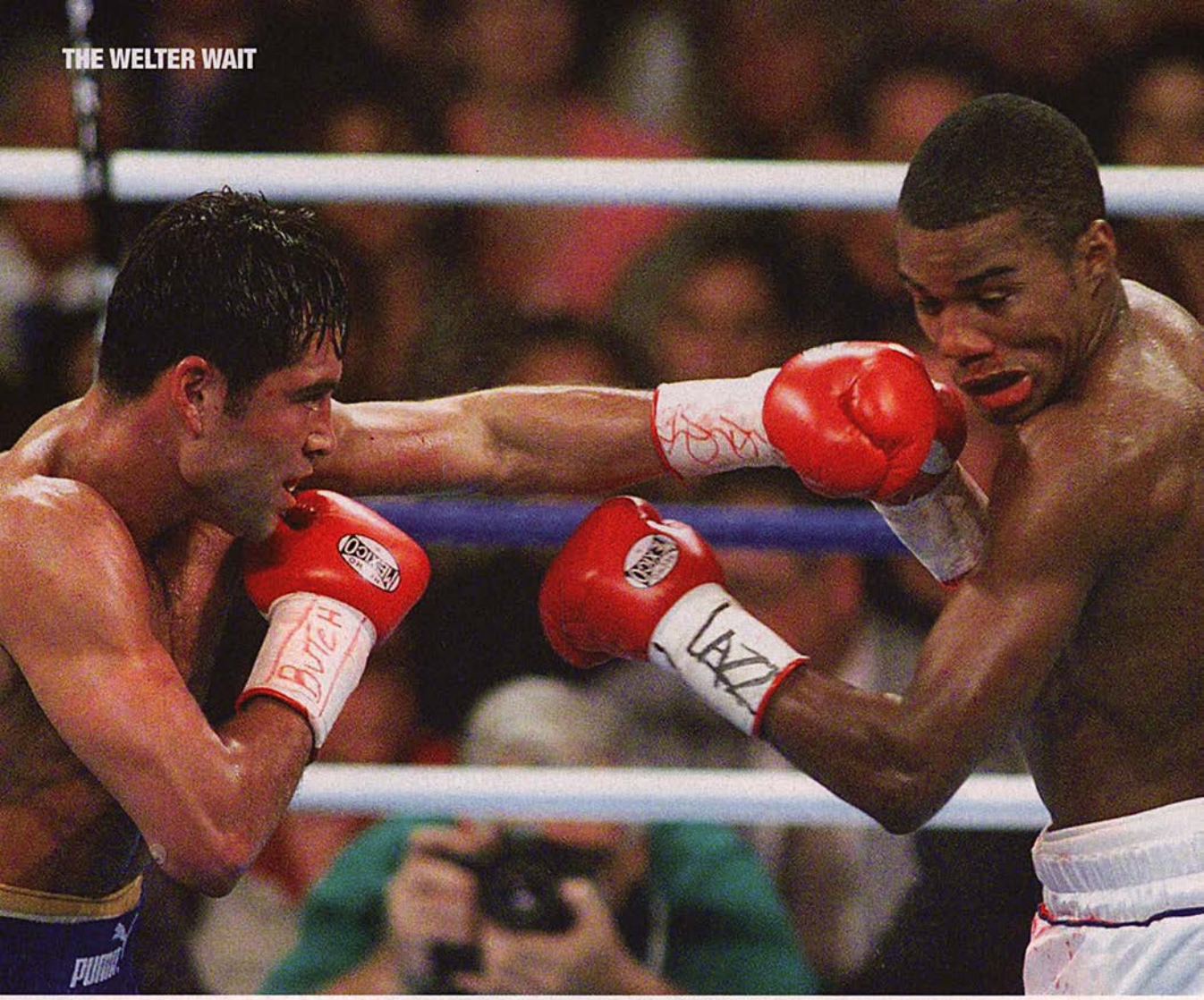
Six years later on September 18 1999, Oscar De La Hoya (31-0, 25 KOs) and Felix Trinidad (35-0, 30 KOs) fought at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. This one had it all – the IBF beltholder from Puerto Rico and the lineal champion/WBC titlist from America, "Tito" versus the "Golden Boy." Dubbed "The Fight of the Millennium," the event was a massive commercial success, but the fight itself failed to live up to expectations. De La Hoya was sharp early on and appeared to control most of the action with his superior boxing craft, but Trinidad never stopped working. Feeling that he was far ahead on the scorecards, Oscar coasted in the later rounds and let Tito back into the fight. It was enough for two of the judges to narrowly score it for the Puerto Rican, who pulled out a controversial majority decision win. The card sold more than 1.4 million pay-per-view

Leonard vs. Hearns I is proof that welterweight is a glamour division when the best fight the best. Whitaker vs. Chavez ended in controversy but still crowned a pound-for-pound king.

buys and both men collected eight-figure paydays, yet there would never be a rematch. De La Hoya would go on to become the marquee attraction of his generation, fighting the likes of Shane Mosley, Fernando Vargas, Bernard Hopkins, Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao. Trinidad would keep his undefeated record intact until being dominated and stopped by Hopkins in their middleweight unification bout just weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. Fans still argue to this day over who won in 1999 and how a rematch would have played out.

THE BAD:

A decade after Trinidad-De La Hoya, fans began calling for a showdown between Floyd "Money" Mayweather and Manny "Pacman" Pacquiao. They would eventually get the fight, but well past its due date. After an arduous negotiation full of stalling, excuses and finger-pointing from both sides, the bout finally happened on May 2, 2015, in Mayweather's adopted hometown of Las Vegas. Pacquiao, the WBO welterweight titlist, entered with a record of 57-5-2 (38 KOs) while Mayweather, the unified Ring, WBA and WBC titlist, was perfect at 47-0 (26 KOs). After all the hype, all the trash talk, the absurdly priced tickets and the ludicrous PPV price tag of $100, the promised "Fight of the Century" played out as the dud of the century. Mayweather overcautiously did just enough to win the majority of the 12 sleep-inducing rounds, taking a unanimous decision victory over a lethargic Pacquiao. The event shattered records with 5.7 million PPV buys worldwide, ultimately bringing in more than half a billion dollars in revenue. As wonderful as it was to have mainstream attention on boxing for one night, the lackluster action in the ring didn't exactly build new fans. Social media was full of posts from casual observers and celebrities proclaiming they were "done with boxing for good." And the subsequent "IV Gate" scandal involving Mayweather and the United States Anti-Doping Agency didn't exactly improve the fight's legacy. Strangely enough, Pacquiao would split with longtime promoter Bob Arum a few years later to sign a deal with Mayweather adviser Al Haymon. Only time will tell if a rematch takes place. If so, perhaps a more faded



version of both fighters could lead to better action and redemption with casual fans.

THE UNCERTAIN:

Fast-forward to the present day, and once again a potentially game-changing fight looms in the welterweight division. Spence (25-0, 21 KOs), fresh off his successful IBF title defense against Mikey Garcia in front of 47,525 fans at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, is seen by many as the heir apparent to Mayweather's throne. Meanwhile, Terence Crawford (35-0, 26 KOs), fresh off his successful WBO title defense against Amir Khan at Madison Square Garden in New York, is seen by many as the best fighter in the world pound-for-pound. Crawford-Spence has the potential to be this generation's Hearns-Leonard. At the same time, political issues have fans concerned it might become May-Pac 2.0. For starters, Spence is part of Haymon's Premier Boxing Champions (PBC) platform, which lives exclusively on Fox and premium cable network Showtime. Crawford fights under Arum's Top Rank, which has an exclusive deal with ESPN. This is reminiscent of the situation with Mayweather and Pacquiao, who had contracts at the time of their fight with Showtime and HBO, respectively. In the end, those two and their management found a way to strike a deal, because they needed one another; there were simply no other names that could bring the same amount of revenue. But while Spence appears to be the only lucrative option for Crawford and Arum, that is not the case at all on the other side of the street.

There is a lack of top welterweights in Top Rank's stable for Crawford to fight, while there is an embarrassment of riches for Spence over at PBC. A unification bout with current WBC titlist Shawn Porter (30-2-1, 17 KOs) appears to be next for "The Truth." Uzbekistan native Kudratillo Abdukakhorov (16-0, 9 KOs) just became the mandatory for Spence's IBF title and should factor into the equation within the next year. Sergey Lipinets (15-1, 11 KOs), fresh off his come-from-behind win over Lamont Peterson, is another in-house option at PBC. A fight between the undefeated but often inactive Keith Thurman (29-0, 22 KOs) and Pacquiao (61-7-2, 39 KOs) is nearly signed as well. Should Spence be successful against Porter, the Pacquiao-Thurman winner provides a marquee name in the near future. If that four-man tournament of Spence-Porter and Pacquiao-Thurman actually comes off, the

De La Hoya vs. Trinidad resulted in a disputed decision but did record PPV business. Could an eventual clash between Spence and Crawford generate significant interest and revenue?

eventual winner would have massive name recognition and likely be one of the top brands in all of boxing.

The only welterweights of note that Top Rank represents are Lithuanian Egidijus Kavaliauskas (21-0-1, 17 KOs) and Russian prospect Alexander Besputin (13-0, 9 KOs), neither of whom is exactly a household name. Arum has tried to match Crawford with popular PBC fighters in the past, offering a career-high purse to former 140-pound champion Danny Garcia, who never returned their calls. They are seemingly running out of suitable opponents for "Bud" to face.

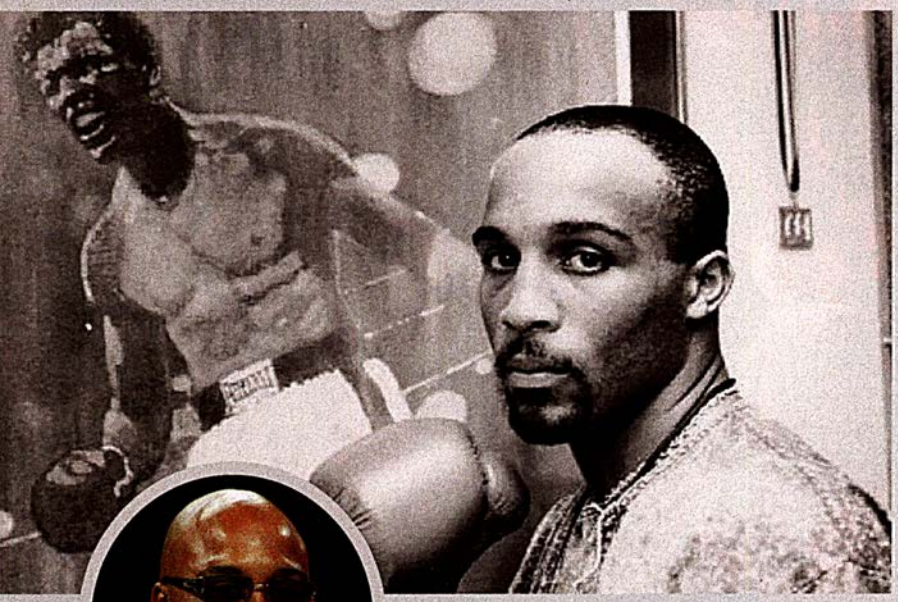
Recent boxing history proves that when an "A-side versus B-side" mentality is in play, anticipated matchups are often delayed and sometimes never take place at all. With so many potential in-house matchups for Team Spence at PBC on top of his mandatory obligations, it appears they won't be ready to even entertain the Crawford fight until 2021. By then, the Omaha, Nebraska, native will be going on 34 years old and entering his 14th year as a pro. Would the fight be past its expiration date by then? Could one of them lose their "0" in the meantime? Will Spence, who is a very big welterweight, still be able to make 147 pounds comfortably in a couple years?

In the end, it all comes down to the fighters themselves. If Errol Spence and Terence Crawford truly want to prove they're the best fighter pound-for-pound, let alone the best welterweight in the world, they'll push their management to get it done. Only time will tell just how long the current wait at welterweight lasts. Can Crawford-Spence go from fantasy to reality? And if so, will it be an addition to the chapter on iconic welterweight fights in boxing history books? Or will it be delayed so long that fans view it as another Mayweather-Pacquiao money grab and tune out? Worst of all, might it end up as an addition to the sad, long list of dream fights that never were?

For now, the wait continues.

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast 'The Neutral Corner' can be heard on iTunes, Spotify, and everywhere podcasts are found.

JAMES MCGIRT: THE BEST OF BUDDY



HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE **BUDDY MCGIRT** RELIVES SIX OF HIS FINEST PERFORMANCES

By Tom Gray

Coach and teacher.

When you hear the name Buddy McGirt in 2019, that is the direction in which your mind automatically wanders. The Brentwood, New York, native has taken Byron Mitchell, Antonio Tarver, Arturo Gatti and, more recently, Sergey Lipinets and Sergey Kovalev to world titles during his stellar career as a trainer.

But now it's time for a refresher course.

McGirt, a former IBF junior welterweight and WBC welterweight titleholder, was a fighter first. How good are we talking? At his best, "Buddy" was among the top pound-for-pound fighters in the world, an authentic world champion who possessed serious talent, willpower and an unquenchable desire to succeed.

That is why McGirt's induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame this year comes as no surprise.

"I ain't gonna lie to you; I cried when I was told," revealed McGirt, who is immensely proud of his ring accomplishments. "I was driving home from the store during the holidays, and I know that every year, around that time, they announce the inductees. I was like, 'Damn, when am I gonna get inducted? It's been a while.' (laughs) As soon as I walked in the house, Ed Brophy (executive director of the IBHOF) called me.

"Being inducted is something that's very hard to explain, but it's the greatest feeling in the world."

Following a draw in his professional debut in March 1982, McGirt won his next 28 fights before dropping a 10-round decision to fellow unbeaten contender Frankie Warren. The loss was a bitter pill to swallow, but McGirt quickly returned to winning ways, scoring eight consecutive victories before being given his first world title opportunity.

The date was Valentine's Day 1988, the vacant IBF 140-pound title was at stake and the opponent was none other than Frankie Warren. McGirt claimed revenge as well as the title when he stopped Warren in 12 rounds. But, as every world champion knows, it's harder to stay at the top than to get there.

Following a stunning first-round knockout of Olympic champion Howard Davis, McGirt was dethroned by another Olympic gold medalist who was at the peak of his powers. The brilliant Meldrick Taylor turned in an electrifying performance in Atlantic City, halting the champion in the 12th round.

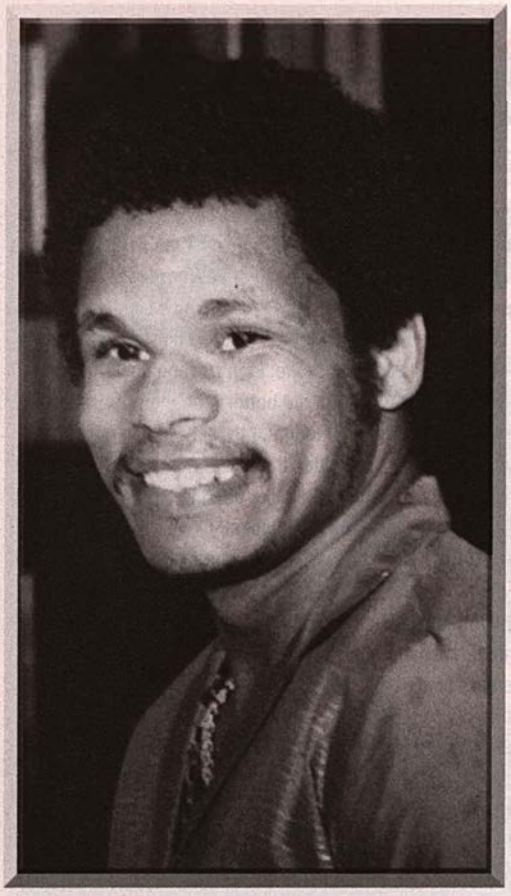
"I fought four Olympic gold medalists: Davis, Taylor, Pernell Whitaker and Patrizio Oliva," stated McGirt with pride. "How many fighters today can say they fought four Olympic champions?"

When informed that Muhammad Ali did the same (Ali faced Floyd Patterson, Joe Frazier, George Foreman and Leon Spinks), McGirt reveled in the comparison. "OK, only Ali and I fought four Olympic champions. Ain't that crazy? We also have the same birthday."

The Taylor setback hurt, but McGirt had been down before and knew how to respond. Sixteen victories later, McGirt, now fighting as a welterweight, was No. 1 challenger to WBC titleholder Simon Brown. A fierce knockout artist, Brown was installed as the favorite, but the Jamaican power-puncher couldn't match McGirt for speed or skills. A 10th-round knockdown removed any doubts, and McGirt cruised to a unanimous decision win and his second world title.

Two defenses followed, but McGirt's body had already begun to betray him when he was outpointed by the legendary Whitaker in 1993. Surgery to correct a torn rotator cuff was a success, but after proving the naysayers wrong by returning to the ring, McGirt quickly fell out of love with the sport. The gallant New Yorker was outpointed by Whitaker for a second time and never took part in another world title fight. He retired in January 1997 with a record of 73-6-1 (48 knockouts).

Despite setbacks in and out of the ring, McGirt's boxing career is sprinkled with glory and defining moments. The two-weight world champion now looks back on six of his greatest hits:

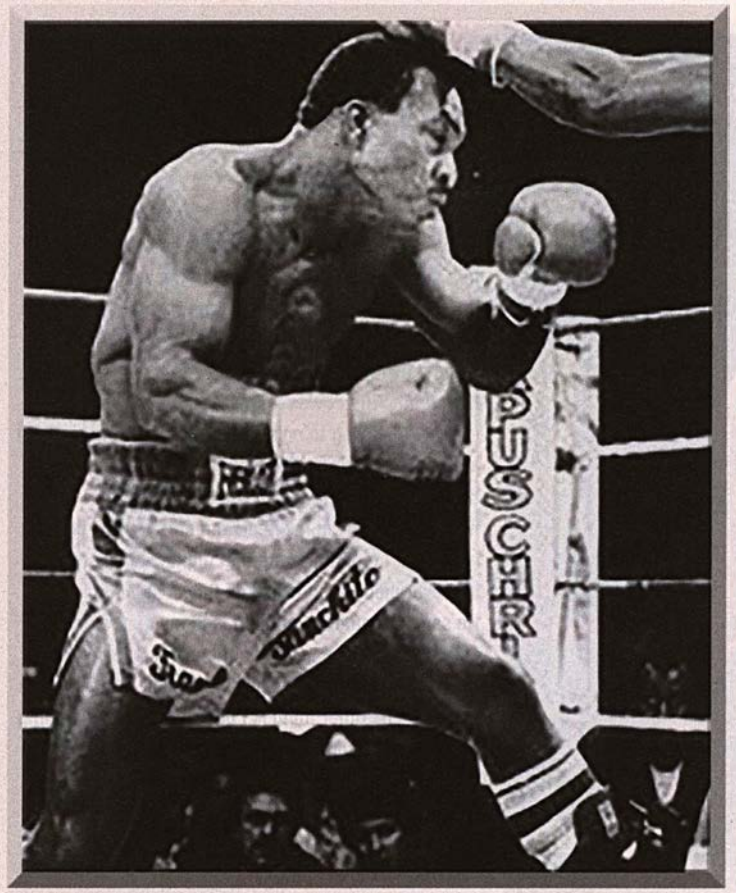


SAOUL MAMBY

September 25, 1986/Felt Forum, New York
Titles: Non-title bout

"After the (first professional) loss to (Frankie) Warren, I came out of the arena and told everyone I wanted to walk back to the hotel by myself. I told everyone I wanted to be alone. I walked back to the hotel, maybe a mile-and-a-half walk, and I did a lot of thinking. When I got there, my manager (Al Certo) was there, and I told him, 'Al, get me a fight.' He was like, 'What?' I said, 'I've thought about it, I understand what I did wrong and we've got to get back in the ring.' That fight was in July and I fought Mamby in September. One of the reasons I wanted to get back in there is people always talk about your last fight. If I got back in there, then they would be asking about the fight I just had. (laughs) It's funny; Randy Gordon (then chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission) called me the week before the Mamby fight and said, 'Buddy, you're going from a guy 5-foot-2 to a tall guy like Mamby who can box, and he's a former world champion. He's never been knocked out. How do you think you're gonna beat him?' I said, 'Randy, just watch. You'll see!' The loss to Warren made me a better fighter, and fighting Saoul Mamby made me an even better fighter. I learned more in that one fight than I learned in my entire career. The funny part is I hit Mamby with a right hand, I think it was in the eighth round, and his knees buckled. I said to myself, 'I'm goin' in for the KO.' I went in for the KO and Mamby hit me in the liver, and I was just so messed up. When I got in the clinch, he said, 'Slow your young ass down!'"

RESULT: MCGIRT UD 10

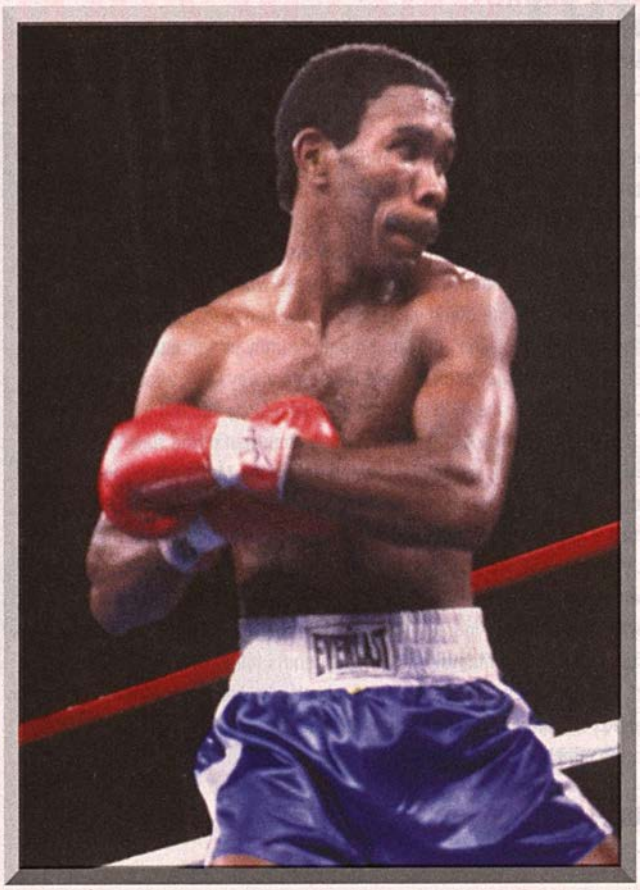


FRANKIE WARREN II

February 14, 1988/Memorial Coliseum, Corpus Christi, Texas
Titles: Vacant IBF junior welterweight

"We were told we had a title fight because Terry Marsh, God bless him, had gotten sick (the unbeaten Marsh relinquished the IBF title and permanently retired in September 1987 after being diagnosed with epilepsy). My manager tells me I have to go to Corpus Christi to fight Frankie Warren, and I said, 'Shit, I'll fight him in his house.' The training camp, everything, went great, but I always had this thing where I'd go off my mom's reaction. When she saw me, she said, 'You look good, baby!' When she said that, at the back of my mind, I'm saying, 'I'm fuckin' him up!' My mom had seen me before the first fight with Warren and told me to be careful, so when her reaction changed, I knew there was no way I could lose. For me, it was my greatest victory, fighting a guy who had beaten me, in his hometown for the world championship. The rematch with Warren was scheduled for 15 rounds, and so was my first defense against Howard Davis."

RESULT: MCGIRT TKO 12

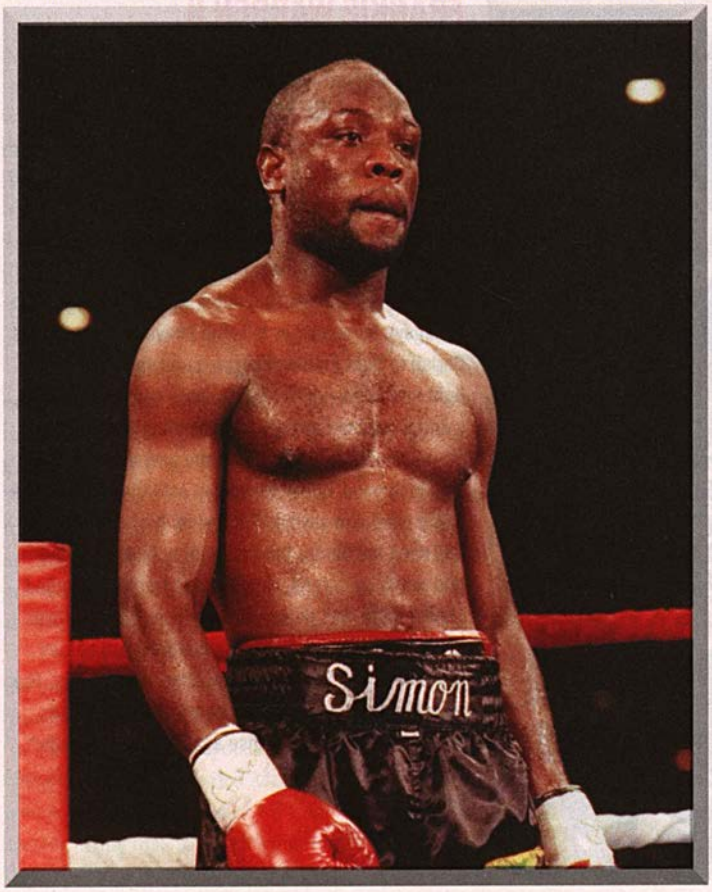


HOWARD DAVIS JR.

July 31, 1988/Felt Forum, New York
Titles: IBF junior welterweight

"I sparred with Howard Davis when I was 17 years old, and he was paying $500 a week. My car only cost me $100. God bless him, may he rest in peace, I had to drive from Brentwood to Hempstead for $500. And I gotta tell you, he was so goddamn fast. I was like, 'Fuck!' I'm not gonna say I got the better of him – he beat the shit out of me; I ain't gonna lie. But I was a 17-year-old kid, and I still did better than the professionals who were there. When we fought, I thought to myself, 'OK, he's a little older, you're older, it's 110 degrees outside.' But when I saw his face, he looked like he didn't want to be there. I landed to his body and he still looked like he didn't want to be there. But, in my honest opinion, when I knocked him down with the right hand, he could have got up if he really wanted to. Howard Davis was once knocked down by a guy called 'Stormin' Norman Goins (July 1978), and he went down like Goins shot him. Actually he was down twice. Even after that, Howard Davis got up and beat the shit out of Norman Goins. When I fought Howard Davis, he got caught to the body, then I landed the right that put him down. He knew he was in for 15 rounds of that shit."

RESULT: MCGIRT KO 1

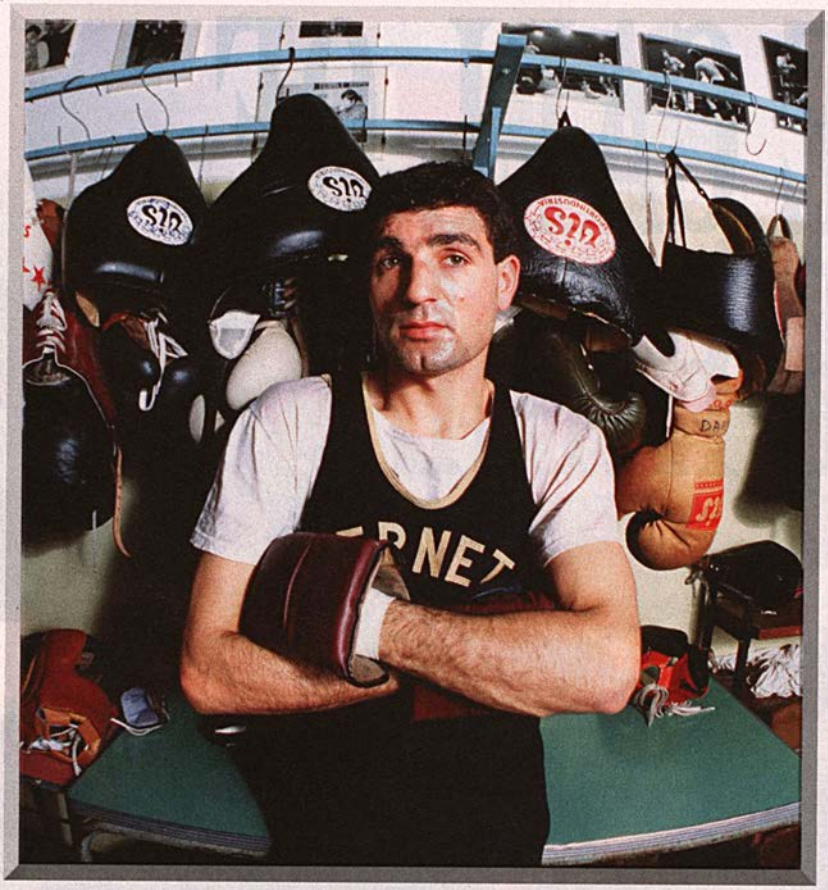


SIMON BROWN

November 29, 1991/The Mirage, Las Vegas
Titles: WBC welterweight

"I was in the zone for that fight. I was coming off an injury to my bicep tendon the year before, and they'd told me I'd never fight again. Within a year, I had the title fight and I was in a zone that I can't even explain. After the fight, it took me about four or five days to come down from it. I couldn't even tell you how hard Brown hit. When I was in the locker room tying my shoes, I'm saying to myself – excuse my language – 'I ain't losin' to this motherfucker!' No matter what he did, I was gonna have a fuckin' answer for it. I had my own strategy in my head and nobody was gonna change it. I got in the ring that night, saw my mom and everybody, then I see Lou Rawls standing there. He sang the national anthem, and my mother loves Lou Rawls. When I saw him, there was no way I was gonna lose. I said to myself, 'I'm kickin' this guy's ass tonight!' The other thing is I understood what winning the championship meant at the time. The first time, I didn't really understand it. But I was more seasoned and experienced by then."

RESULT: MCGIRT UD 12

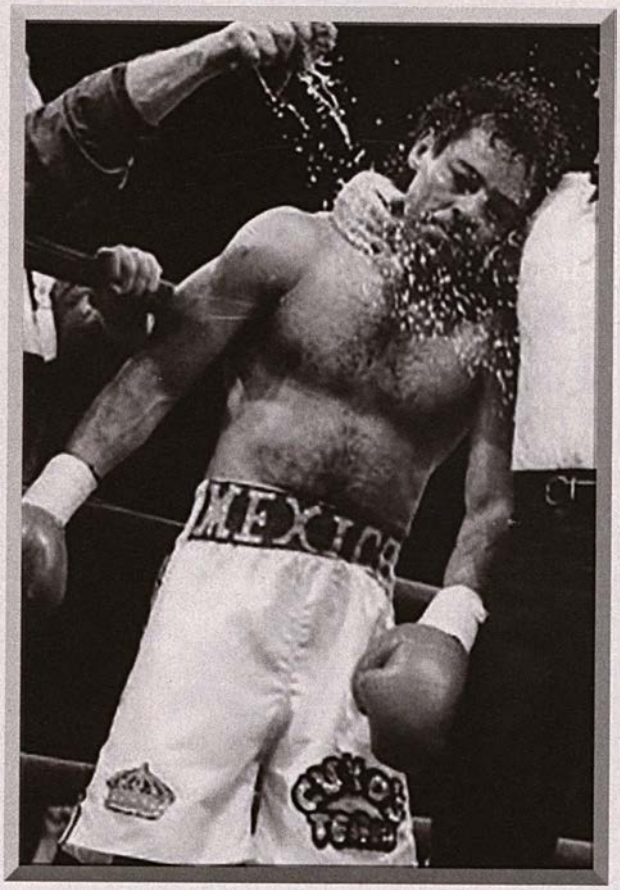


PATRIZIO OLIVA

June 25, 1992/Acquaflash di Licola, Licola, Italy
Titles: WBC welterweight

"My manager fucked up. God bless him, he's dead now, but he fucked up. He turned down a rematch with Meldrick Taylor because he felt I should have got $200,000 more. I'm like, 'Who gives a shit? I'm getting $1.8 million. Who gives a fuck about an extra 200,000?' Oliva was very deceiving, very awkward, and I was out of it that night. I couldn't get adjusted to the food over there, and things didn't click for me until the fourth or fifth round. Suddenly I woke up and said, 'Shit, I'm losing my title. I've got to do something!' He was so awkward, and I had to figure out a way to get to him. Looking back, I thank Oliva for the opportunity to go abroad and fight. It was a great experience for me, and my mom had a great time in Italy. It was great for me to see her enjoy it."

RESULT: MCGIRT UD 12



GENARO LEON

January 12, 1993/Paramount Theatre, New York
Titles: WBC welterweight

"The fight was in January, and I got hurt in December. I got hurt three days before Christmas when I was sparring Beau James. I'll never forget it, I went to throw an uppercut, and it was the worst feeling I'd ever had in my life. I was crying like a baby. They told me I had tendonitis, but this wasn't tendonitis. I said, 'Look, I've had tendonitis. This shit hurts.' They said, 'Oh, it's because it's inflamed.' And, shit, I'm not a doctor; I took their word for it. The truth came out six or seven months later. I'd torn my rotator cuff just before the fight, but the doctors kept telling me it was tendonitis. They told my manager to tell me it was tendonitis because they knew after Genaro Leon I was gonna fight Pernell. Anyway, I went through with the Leon fight, but in the three weeks before the fight I couldn't spar. All I could do was run, shadowbox and jump rope. In the fight, I couldn't throw any left hooks. I got hit in the 12th round, but, to tell you the truth, I was more off-balance than anything. I was like, 'Oh shit. I was almost down.' It was the longest 12 rounds of my life, because I was in there without a left hook. And the thing is, I still went ahead with the Whitaker fight two months later. I always considered myself a warrior in the ring."

RESULT: MCGIRT UD 12

HALL OF FAME 2019

THE CALL OF THE HALL

FOR ANY TRUE FAN OF THE SWEET SCIENCE, INDUCTION DAY WEEKEND AT THE INTERNATIONAL BOXING HALL OF FAME IS THE STUFF OF DREAMS

By **David Greisman**

It can be a long journey to make it into the International Boxing Hall of Fame – but for the boxers enshrined there and the fans of boxing's heroes and history who flock there, the journey is worthwhile. After years of fighting and training, of sacrifices and suffering, a boxer's legacy becomes tangible, their accomplishments made immortal.

"The story that boxing has is long and worth telling," says Ed Brophy, the IBHOF's executive director. "The champions, trainers, promoters and others who live their lives in boxing should be recognized and honored."

This year is the 30th anniversary of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, which opened in Canastota, New York, in June 1989. It was born from an effort years before to honor two local kids who had gone on to win championships: Carmen Basilio, the former welterweight and middleweight king who once bested Sugar Ray Robinson, and Basilio's nephew, Billy Backus, who briefly held the 147-pound crown for six months in the early 1970s, scoring an upset stoppage of Jose Napoles thanks to a bad cut.

Soon came the first class of inductees in 1990, a sizable inaugural class featuring legendary names: Muhammad Ali, Henry Armstrong, Jack Dempsey, Jack Johnson and Sugar Ray Robinson, among the many others. It has grown since then, outlasting the World Boxing Hall of Fame in California and surpassing the decades-defunct Ring Magazine Hall of Fame.

That didn't happen overnight. It's the result of the continued work of the hall's staff and a significant cadre of volunteers. They have built relationships over the years, gained credibility and amassed staying power. Fighters and their families can donate memorabilia and other artifacts to Canastota, confident in the love and respect the hall has for the sport and the people involved.

That, in turn, rewards us fans who visit, gazing reverentially at long-ago history and blasts from the not-so-

The International Boxing Hall of Fame's induction weekend is the biggest annual event hosted by the quiet and secluded town of Canastota, New York.

distant past.

The fans who visit the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota must travel to a small town four hours upstate from New York City, half an hour outside of Syracuse. You have to truly want to be there. And if you're a real fan, you really must visit. What Cooperstown is to baseball and Canton is to football, Canastota is to boxing. It is a pilgrimage for us devotees to the sweet science.

Walking through the IBHOF, you can see robes, trunks and shoes, but also hand wraps and mouth guards – and then flash back to footage of Bob Foster defending his championship or Sugar Ray Leonard putting forth another dazzling performance. You'll look at fight tickets saved by those who saw John L. Sullivan, Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Max Schmeling and Muhammad Ali. You'll marvel at fist casts comparing the hand sizes of fighters over the generations.

Then you'll walk into an adjacent building, and your jaw will drop at the sight of the ring that Madison Square Garden used from 1925 through 2007, where Joe Louis edged Jersey Joe Walcott but was retired by Rocky Marciano, where Robinson and Jake LaMotta met for two of their six storied clashes, and where Ali and Joe Frazier twice went to war.

"That ring," the IBHOF's Brophy says, "is the battlefield of some of the greatest fights."

Some 10,000 people visit the museum each year, and even more come to town for the annual induction weekend. That's because the IBHOF is more than a museum. As the name indicates, it is a hall of fame, canonizing the best fighters and others whose contributions are worthy of acclaim, including trainers, referees, judges, promoters, managers, broadcasters and journalists.

"It recognizes what I've done," says former heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis, who entered Canastota in 2009. "People remember, paying homage to a certain degree. It shows our dedication, our hard work, the sacrifice of what we went through. It was a good feeling to be inducted. The whole city came out."

It's more than Canastota that comes out. Induction weekend has become a beloved tradition. Fighters and fans travel in from the United States and beyond, depending on who's being inducted, bringing between 10,000 and 15,000 people every June. That creates an incredible atmosphere over the course of a four-day event for what is an otherwise quiet town.

"Canastota may not have bright lights or a fast pace or the most exciting things to see or do, but what it does have is the spirit of boxing," Brophy says.

This year's induction weekend takes place from June 6-9 and include talks, an autograph and memorabilia show, a cocktail reception and banquet, a golf tournament, and a 5K race and fun run, all building up to the parade in Downtown Canastota and the induction ceremony. There has often been a nationally broadcast boxing card held at the nearby Turning Stone Resort Casino about

Boxing memorabilia, both enshrined and for trade and sale, is a big part of the Hall of Fame weekend.

11 miles up the road.

"You're surrounded by people who live and breathe and bleed boxing," said David Kushin, a 44-year-old fan from New Jersey who has been to induction weekend five times since 2011. "It's not close to any of us, but it's totally worth it. Just to have that forum to sit and listen to these people, to go up to them after and chat and shake their hand and take a picture – for me, as a boxing fan, that's priceless."

That access awed Aris Pina from the outset in 2000, when the then-teenaged boxing enthusiast convinced his father, also a big boxing fan, to travel upstate from New York City.

"You have a chance to interact with these legends, fighters and former contenders," said Pina, now 34 and a CompuBox operator. "My dad was blown away by it. I'm meeting Marvin Hagler and Joe Frazier, seeing Carlos Ortiz and Jeff Chandler. All I'd been doing was reading The Ring magazine and studying everything I could about boxing history. This was the first time I could interact with guys I'd only read about and seen in videos."

Pina and his father returned nearly every year over the next 14 years. His second visit was as memorable as the first – Kid Gavilan threw a bolo punch at him, barely missing, then smiled and patted his head.

While being able to get truly up close and personal is of course special for fans, it also stands out for the fighters who were once accustomed to fame, many of whom are long removed from the limelight.

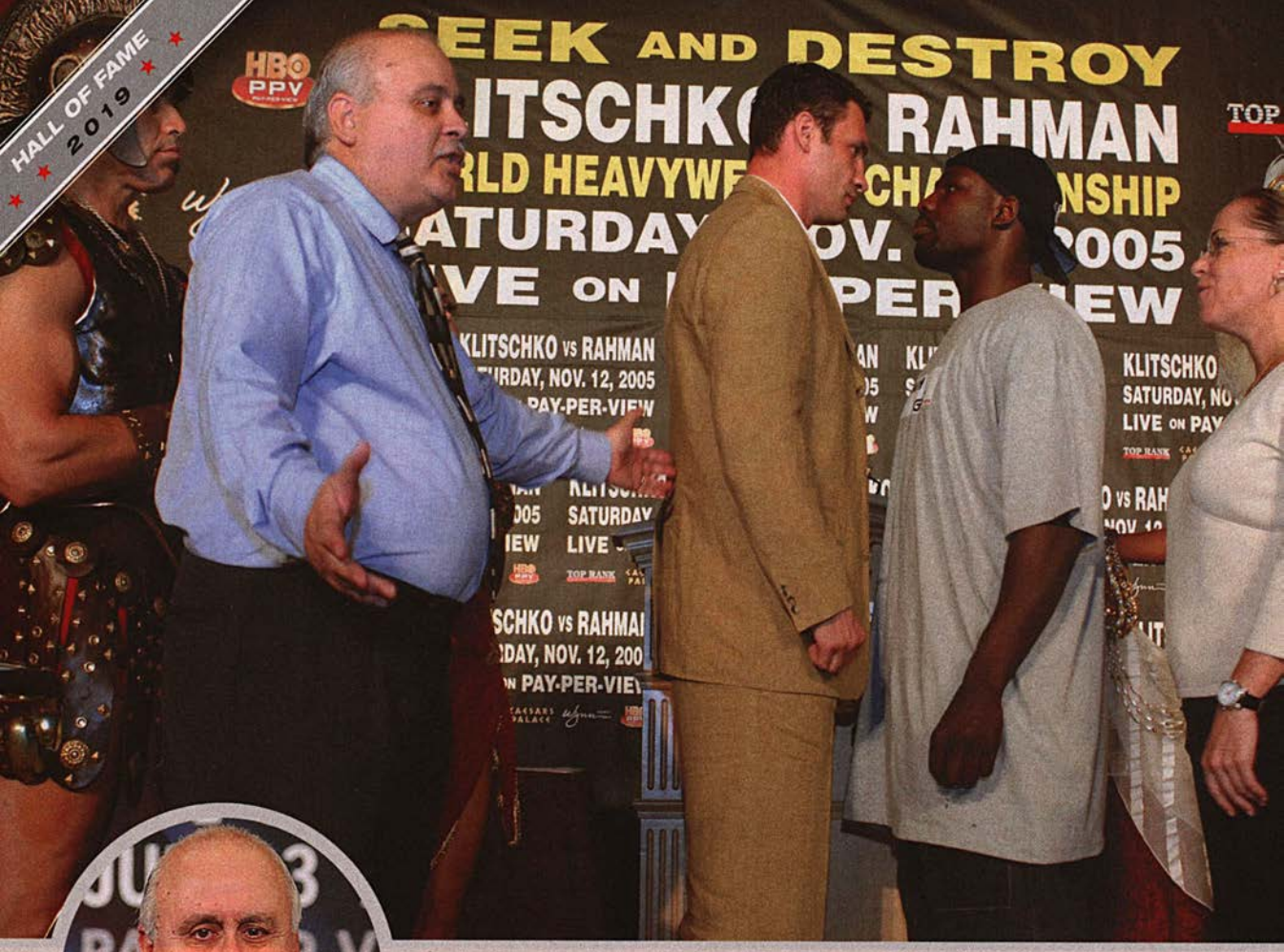
"As soon as your career is over, traditionally you're forgotten and have to go into real life again," says former lightweight titleholder Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini, who was inducted in 2015. "That can be hard on fighters. So it's a wonderful thing to be recognized after the fact, that your career had an impact on somebody somewhere. You got people from all over the world, true boxing fans, that are there to see you and mingle."

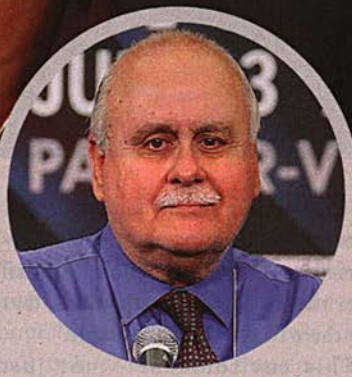
This environment – not just enshrinement, but appreciation and celebration – is what the IBHOF has been able to foster over the past three decades. It is both a museum and living history, both educational and entertaining, both an exhibition and an extravaganza. And while it is based on the past, it also looks to the future: toward adding to the collection and potentially expanding the museum so that more can be featured.

"We're very proud of what has been done, and we're excited about what can continue to be done," Brophy said. "It's important to the sport. It's important to the champions. And it's important to the fans."

Learn more about the International Boxing Hall of Fame at ibhof.com. Follow David Greisman on Twitter @fightingwords2.

HALL OF FAME 2019





HELPING HAND

MUCH-LOVED PUBLICIST **LEE SAMUELS** WILL BE ENSHRINED IN THE HALL OF FAME ALONGSIDE THE BOXERS HE HAS FAITHFULLY SERVED

By **Michael Rosenthal**

Publicist Lee Samuels was on the road working Top Rank's now-defunct ESPN Thursday night series when company president Bob Arum called him. "I'm going to give you a fighter," said Arum, meaning he wanted Samuels to act as liaison between the boxer in question and the press. "Who is it?" Samuels responded. "Marvin Hagler," the boss said. "What are we doing?" Samuels asked. "We're fighting (Sugar Ray) Leonard."

That was early in 1987. It would become one of the most historic fights of all time, and the big names – the names in the newspaper headlines and on television – were Hagler, Leonard, Arum, the Petronelli brothers, Angelo Dundee and other famous boxing people, just as today's stars command our attention on multiple platforms.

Behind great fighters are often great publicists, and Lee Samuels (beside Wladimir Klitschko) is a boxing PR legend.

And just like today, behind the scenes there were people like Samuels, who has worked anonymously alongside the stars in the sport – and the most important journalists – for more than three-plus decades as one of Top Rank's lead public relations officers. In that capacity, he successfully managed the tricky balancing act of keeping demanding fighters, writers and his boss happy while building a reputation as an honest, hardworking and likable professional.

Samuels will be inducted into the

International Boxing Hall of Fame in the non-participant category this coming June in Canastota, New York.

"I think the fighters have always loved Lee," said Kevin Iole, Yahoo! Sports' longtime boxing writer. "Fighters can be tough to deal with. And Lee has to deal with them when they're at their crankiest, when they're cutting weight. That's not a time when they necessarily want to talk to the media. Lee made it happen.

"And he was never a guy who looked for credit. His only thought was publicizing a fighter, publicizing Arum, publicizing boxing – anything he could do to shed light on those things."

Samuels' introduction to boxing came as it did for most of us: as a fan.

Richard Lee Samuels grew up in the late-1940s and early '50s in Pennsville, New Jersey, a town of about 7,000 people 40 miles south of Philadelphia, which would explain why he is an avid fan of the Phillies. He grew up poor but happy on a farm, on which his father grew corn, tomatoes and lettuce and sold the goods at a roadside stand.

He was an avid reader for as long as he can remember, particularly when it came to sports. He devoured the local sports pages every chance he got, reading, among many notable Philly sportswriters, a bright young columnist named Larry Merchant. He also fondly remembers listening to sports on the radio, including boxing.

"I had a radio in my room," he said. "I listened to Phillies games, but I also listened to boxing. I remember listening to the Muhammad Ali (then Cassius Clay)-Doug Jones fight (in 1963). I was captivated. When you hear a fight on the radio, it's different. You hear every sound. It was amazing."

Samuels gave baseball a try in high school but quickly realized he couldn't hit a curveball. That's when he decided his future was in the "non-participant" realm, specifically as a sportswriter in the beginning.

He started out on his local weekly, worked for a few more publications and then graduated to the Philadelphia Bulletin, an evening paper that folded in 1982. Along the way, he covered many fights. That included two that featured Ali: his first encounter with Leon Spinks in 1978 and his last fight, against Trevor Berbick in 1981.

Ali was promoted by Arum, whose PR department was run by Hall of Famer Irving Rudd.

"I'll tell you how Irving handled me and why I tried to become the man he was," Samuels said. "I needed to talk to Ali and Dundee for the first fight. Irving said, 'He knows you're coming. He wants to talk to you. Angelo will be sitting next to him.' I said, 'C'mon.' He takes me to a room, and there are Ali and Angelo.

"I tried to do the same thing when I was a publicist," added Samuels, who now is a coordinator for Top Rank. "You don't make a big deal about what you're doing. You just try to help people as best you can."

Mark Whicker, now a columnist with the Los Angeles Daily News, covered many fights with Samuels as a fellow employee at the Bulletin.

"In the late '70s, early '80s, he covered boxing and I was a columnist," Whicker said. "Lee was just very, very diligent. And everyone liked him. That's how it is now. Bob (Arum) is very demanding. It's important that you're able to roll with the punches. Lee has been able to do that."

Samuels had caught Arum's attention by the time the Bulletin folded, shortly after which the promoter asked Samuels whether he wanted to handle East Coast publicity for the ESPN series. And Samuels made the move. He's been with Top Rank ever since, except for a short period in the mid-'90s when he worked for a sportsbook in Las Vegas.

He was asked what moments or fights or events stand out most to him, which elicited a sigh. There are just so many. From Hagler to Oscar De La Hoya to Manny Pacquiao to Terence Crawford and Vasiliy Lomachenko today, Samuels has been at the center of the action for several generations.

And he never took that privilege for granted, whether it was making sure the fighters had what they needed, connecting them to journalists, writing press releases, helping to organize press conferences or anything else that needed to be done. He earned his keep.

"Lee was always a solid, no-nonsense guy," Arum said. "He never gossiped like so many people in the business do. He stuck with what he was supposed to be doing. He was a grinder, a hard worker."

Of course, Samuels is thrilled that he will be inducted into the Hall of Fame. Who wouldn't be? He tried to play it down, though, focusing more on the people who helped get to this point than on himself. That type of selflessness wouldn't surprise those who know him.

Another example: Samuels had known boxing writer Jack Welsh from his days in Philadelphia, and they remained friends after they moved to Las Vegas. Welsh struggled both financially and with his health the last few years of his life, so much so that Samuels and Iole helped look after him – giving him money, doing his chores, just spending time with him – until the day he died.

"Lee was tirelessly devoted to Jack. He would've gone to the end of the earth for him," Iole said.

It's no wonder that Samuels was co-winner of the Boxing Writers Association of America Marvin Kohn Good Guy Award in 2006.

"Lee is just a wonderful guy," said Dan Rafael, ESPN.com's boxing writer. "He's one of the nicest, most enthusiastic people I know. Even in bad times, in difficult moments, he finds the silver lining. There are a lot of assholes in this business, people you wouldn't spend five minutes with unless it was part of your job. Lee definitely doesn't fall into that category."

Samuels had to deal with his own tragedy in 2016. His son Eddie, a former hockey player who went into coaching, died of heart failure at the age of 30. The outpouring of love that Lee and his family received from those in the boxing and wider communities afterward was a reflection of how he is perceived.

"He would've been the first guy to do that if it happened to someone else," Whicker said. "He would've been there to do anything he could."

That's Lee Samuels. RING

ON THE BEAT

Tiara Brown takes it to Sandra Krystyna Kruk of Poland in the women's featherweight final of the 2012 World Boxing Championships in Qinhuangdao, China.

ED JONES

SHE MIGHT BE 'OFFICER FRIENDLY' IN HER DAY JOB AS A COP, BUT **TIARA BROWN** IS ANYTHING BUT AMICABLE IN THE BOXING RING

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Officer Tiara Brown was ready. It wasn't an ideal situation, but if necessary, she was going to defuse the situation. A woman was approaching her with fists balled up, ready to fight.

"She was a mental health consumer (patient), she was under the influence and she was coming toward me," recalled Brown, who then heard a male voice yelling at the woman.

"No, no, don't fight Officer Brown!" said the interested bystander. "Don't do it!"

The woman listened. It was a wise move, considering that Officer Brown is also one of the best junior lightweight boxers on the planet. And while she hasn't had to throw hands in the performance of her duties as a member of the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C., her constituents are well aware of what she can do.

"I get so much respect from the people in the community that I've never had to fight," she said. "I've been on for four years now, and I've not been in one fight. Now, I've had to break up fights and grab someone off my coworkers, but I never had to fight."

That's not surprising, since Brown is respectfully known as "Officer Friendly" by those on her beat, and her dedication to the community

earned her an Officer of the Year award in March. And while her boxing career has her on the fast track to world title honors and a bright future at the top of the sport, even big paydays in the ring won't tempt her to give up her job as a cop.

"People ask me, 'Well, when are you going to leave the department?'" she said. "I don't believe that I have to have one or the other. My passion is being a boxer. I've been a boxer almost 18 years now, but I love being a police officer as well. I don't think that I'll have to choose. They're very lenient with me because they know how I feel about boxing. The chief of police (Peter Newsham), he's in love with boxing himself, so I think everything's gonna work out perfect."

So no issues fighting in a championship fight on Saturday and being back to work on Monday?

"It depends on how good your bobbing and weaving is," she laughs.

There are plenty of laughs in a conversation with the 30-year-old, and her enthusiasm for life is infectious. Add in a social media presence full of positive and inspirational messages, and it's clear that Brown is the kind of role model this world needs.

"It's very important to have a positive attitude, because I see a lot of people who have such negative attitudes that they don't even realize that they're not progressing because of themselves," she said. "There might be doors of opportunity open, but they don't even acknowledge it because they're so negative. So I try to encourage and inspire people to be positive."

At this point, you're probably wondering if Brown even has the killer instinct necessary to navigate the rocky waters of the fight game. But you shouldn't, because one look at her in the ring will eliminate any such questions. A 2012 world champion and three-time USA Boxing national champion, Brown came up short of earning a spot in the Olympics in 2012 and 2016, and while there was an option to wait around for 2020, she'd had enough of the amateur ranks.

"I was so sick of the politics in amateur boxing," said Brown. "And once my best friend, Raquel Miller, made up her mind that she was retiring from the USA team, I knew that if she was leaving, I was leaving too, and we were gonna take this professional journey together. We made a pact to do it, and we did it. And it's been uphill ever since."

Turning pro in September 2016 with a 73-second finish of Khadija Sanders, Brown has raced out to a 7-0 record that includes five knockouts, and there's little doubt that she will be fighting for a world title sooner rather than later. And while there are more big names at lightweight than at 130 pounds, she admits that the highest weight she could probably be successful at is 132 pounds. She says that she can get down to 122 pounds, though, giving her even more options in the coming years.

Brown has never had to fistfight as a member of the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C..

And while there is likely more pro seasoning to be done before Brown starts knocking on the door of titleholders Hyun Mi Choi (WBA), Eva Wahlstrom (WBC), Maiva Hamadouche (IBF) or Ewa Brodnicka (WBO), she did make her first major statement last December when she stopped 46-fight veteran Dahiana Santana, a former world champion.

"I heard that many people thought I was stepping out there too soon with her," Brown said. "I didn't care about any of that. Because in my book, I have over a hundred amateur fights – so I was the veteran when we were fighting, and I showed that in the fight. I don't want to say it was easy, but it was fun to me. I train so hard that when it's time to fight, the fight is easier than what I put my body through during my camp."

It's almost hard to fathom Brown's schedule, one that includes waking up at 3 a.m., going for a two-hour workout, 10 hours on the beat, then three or four more hours in the gym. Then there's the reality of two jobs in which danger could be around every turn. But Brown doesn't focus on the negatives, believing that a higher power is keeping her safe.

"My family, we're Christians, so in all that I do, I put God first and I know that he's watching over me," Brown said. "He's blessed me with all these blessings in such a short time. I've been first on the scene of shootings and saved people's lives, and I've never been shot at or been hurt on the job. I've never been hurt in the boxing ring. I just think I've been truly blessed, so I don't have that fear, because I know there's a higher power – God – and he's protecting me and watching over me. As long as I know that, I think I'm good. I know there's crime out here. I know the dangers. I know that a life can be taken in the snap of a finger. But I also know that I believe in a powerful God who I feel watches over me daily, and I have no concerns."

Again, Tiara Brown is clearly one of a kind, whether it's as a police officer or a prizefighter. But there is one more question that needs an answer:

What gets her blood pumping more, the first bell of a fight or that call coming in over the radio that her services are needed on the streets of D.C.?

"I think the bell," she laughs. "All day, every day. That bell goes off and it's go time. It's me and that girl who trained hard just like I trained, and we're both thinking the same thing. I'm about to inflict as much pain as possible on you, and I hope you're OK in the end, but I have to get the win. I trained so hard. There's nothing like the feeling of the first bell."

Vasiliy Lomachenko gave Anthony Crolla a hellish welcome to Los Angeles, dominating the British challenger en route to a brutal fourth-round KO.

PHOTO BY YONG TECK LIM

FIGHT ROUNDUP

RECENT ACTION AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

VASILIY LOMACHENKO KO 4 ANTHONY CROLLA

April 12, Staples Center, Los Angeles

Anthony Crolla made an odd choice using walk-in music that began with a sample from The Eagles' "Hotel California." In the original song, a weary traveler arrives at a dreamlike pleasure-house full of sketchy people and is unable to decide whether it's heaven or hell. In most situations, that's a pretty comfortable analogy for the sport of prizefighting. In Crolla's case, everyone in the boxing universe had already made that decision for him (the odds were heavily, heavily in favor of hell), so the music just drew attention to an already-ominous atmosphere and made it even darker. But walk in he did – the bee paying tribute to his hometown of Manchester stitched proudly on the back of his robe – to face the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world.

The "beast" who welcomed him to the squared circle of the inferno, Vasiliy Lomachenko, was maybe a little grumpy after his last fight, in which Jose Pedraza had been the first of the Ukrainian's victims to hear the scorecards in three-and-a-half years. Nevermind how lopsided those cards were; the lack of another knockout for Loma had led to accusations of him being human after all. It had also fueled some carping about how the Ring/WBA/WBO lightweight champion had reached the peak of his division-collecting conquest, that 135-pound foes were on the border of being big enough to cancel out his otherworldly skills. And then there were the lingering questions about his willingness to throw right hooks after shoulder surgery in mid-2018.

None of that created any goodwill for Crolla's chances. The original plan

had been for Loma to face IBF beltholder Richard Commey, but the Ghanaian injured his hand during his title-winning stoppage of Isa Chaniev in February and was forced to pull out. Crolla stepped in as a former lightweight titleholder with solid boxing skills but lacking in power, and the consensus was that he wouldn't be repeating Pedraza's accomplishment.

"Downloading" has become the buzzword for what fighters like Lomachenko and Terence Crawford do in the opening rounds: They punch very little and instead observe and calibrate as their opponents nervously try to bank an early point. It started that way against Crolla, but by the end of the first round, the champion was already stringing together four-piece combinations with four different kinds of punches. The challenger scored a nice right to the body and slipped an uppercut under his southpaw opponent's left in the second, but he was clearly chasing something that he was never going to catch. What do you do when the person you're fighting seems to know your style even better than you do? After Lomachenko downloads whatever he needs, he's not really a number-crunching machine; he's more like a rogue artificial intelligence that was created to help people understand themselves but decided it was more fun to destroy them.

By the third, Lomachenko was in his flow and the disparity in power was striking, with Crolla unable to get any leverage on his constantly shifting target or even the breathing room to try. A double-digit flurry of concussive hooks produced some chaos when referee Jack Reiss intervened to call a technical knockdown, saying the ropes had been the only thing holding Crolla up, and Lomachenko and his team began to celebrate. By the time order was restored, the round was almost over. A minute into the fourth, Lomachenko left no doubt with a right hook that caught Crolla above the ear and dropped him like a sleepwalker wandering onto a croquet field – flat on his face, hands by his side.

"You can check out, but you can never leave," goes the song. Crolla will remember the experience forever, no doubt. He even had the hint of an appreciative smile on his blood-streaked face after being helped to his feet. Lomachenko (13-1, 10 KOs) sustained a cut above his left eye from a head clash, but otherwise he, his shoulder and his mystique are doing just fine.

Lomachenko demonstrated his full recovery from shoulder surgery with the fight-ending right hook in Round 4.

Claressa Shields and Christina Hammer fought for the inaugural Ring women's middleweight title.

MITCHELL LEFF

CLARESSA SHIELDS UD 10 CHRISTINA HAMMER

April 13, Boardwalk Hall, Atlantic City

When Claressa Shields was born in 1995, the poor Tyrannosaurus Rex was already two years past its heyday. Thanks to the wicked little Velociraptors of *Jurassic Park*, the once-unassailable top of the dinosaur food chain had been reduced to a lumbering, nearsighted blockhead. Later came the childhood-ruining revelation that the "king of the tyrant lizards" had probably been covered in fluffy feathers (thanks, science!), followed by the humiliating "T-Rex hates pushups" meme. The thrill was gone.

Now Claressa is all grown up, though, and the name "T-Rex" has been rightfully reunited with the carnage it deserves. You could argue that things happen faster in women's boxing because the field is smaller, but the list of accomplishments is staggering: Olympic gold in 2012 and 2016, unified super middleweight titleholder after four pro fights, unified middleweight titleholder after six. In her ninth pro fight, Shields was aiming to become something completely unprecedented: an undisputed middleweight champion wearing The Ring's first-ever women's divisional belt. To get there, she had to go through Christina Hammer, whose WBO title was the final piece of the puzzle.

Hammer, like previous male counterparts Felix Sturm and Arthur Abraham, was a fighter with a steady gig in Germany – a longtime titleholder fighting for an appreciative fan base with a 24-0 record to boot. Things didn't often go well for those men when they stepped outside the warmth of their own borders, so Hammer showed her heart by signing up to face the dangerous Shields in New Jersey. It was seen as the biggest female fight of all time, a true superfight, and the two women's promoters and Showtime had been sowing the seeds for over a year, even double-billing Shields and Hammer on a 2018 card in Detroit, complete with post-fight glaring.

Indeed, the level of excitement was uncommon for a women's fight in the U.S. once the bell rang. After that, the advantage quickly skewed in one direction. Hammer clearly had

physical advantages in height and reach, and Shields – with the range-challenged arms that had inspired the T-Rex nickname when she was a child – mostly came up short with her attempts to counter the German's busy jab with hooks. However, one could see from the power behind those missed shots that they'd be a problem for Hammer if Shields got control of the distance.

She did. In the second, Shields stunned Hammer with a right cross to the body followed by a left hook upstairs, then bared her fangs a bit more by pushing forward behind her own jab to get in close. Hammer was only comfortable fighting from a distance with a one-dimensional, straight-punching style, and she was unnerved by Shields' ability to slip in the pocket and deliver damage from different angles on multiple levels. And "damage" is the key. Hammer came for a fight in the amateur sense – good competition won by superior technique. Even if that had been the case, she would've been beaten by Shields' far more versatile game. But Shields also came to knock her head off.

Past the midway point in the fight, Shields was only gaining speed while Hammer tried unsuccessfully to lock her up. In the eighth, Hammer fell under fire against the ropes and probably avoided getting stopped by spitting out her mouthpiece, but afterward her feet weren't reliably finding the canvas where they expected it to be. She was getting demolished and knew it, but she remained game until the end, trying to give the appearance of having some energy left.

Shields (9-0, 2 KOs) – who won by scores of 98-92, 98-92 and 98-91 – had no such problem and went straight into yelling at the crowd, "What's my name?" "T-REX!" her fans shouldted back. Repeat and repeat. She then pulled off a convincing Ali-esque "I am the greatest" routine with a motor-mouthed mix of charm and menace. For Savannah Marshall, the only fighter with a win over Shields (back in 2012) and now a 5-0 (3 KOs) super middleweight pro, Shields said she'd go to the U.K. Or, she offered, "Bring her to me. I'll kill her." She also said, "Give me Cecilia Braekhus." It's a very intriguing idea. As a welterweight, Braekhus would have an undesirable size disadvantage, but the right catchweight would guarantee a major event for Shields to feed on and a shot at becoming the top woman in boxing.

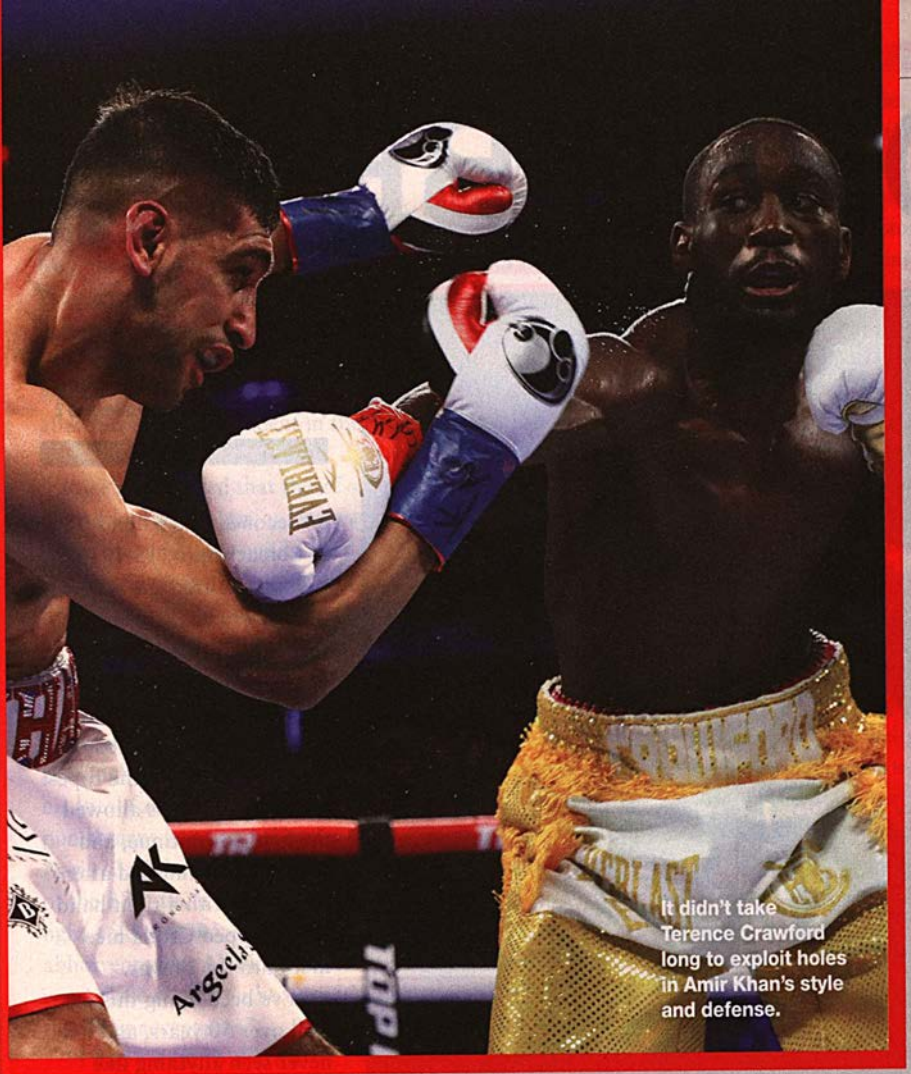
TERENCE CRAWFORD TKO 6 AMIR KHAN

April 20, Madison Square Garden, New York

"Pound-for-pound" has officially become a selling point, so the commentary surrounding the Crawford-Khan pay-per-view lingered a lot on this question: Who's the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter in the world; is it Vasiliy Lomachenko or Terence Crawford? After the fight ... we'll know! Best welterweight? We'll know that too somehow, even though Errol Spence isn't involved.

Unfortunately there are still a lot of things we don't know, including what happened inside Amir Khan's trunks.

Hammer lacked the inside game and physical strength to contend with the smart pressure and heavy right hands from Shields.



It didn't take Terence Crawford long to exploit holes in Amir Khan's style and defense.

More on that later.

Khan, needless to say, wasn't invited to the P4P contest, though he wasn't unfamiliar with it. He's one of those guys like Jorge Linares who had such extreme physical gifts but for whatever reason kept falling short. Khan's primary gift – speed – had been on the decline for a while; this was known. His perceived flaw – his chin – had been "the x-factor" in every fight since the first-round loss to Breidis Prescott in 2008; the riskiness it brought to an event was too tasty for promoters and writers to pass up, no matter how many times Khan weathered a punch. It was Khan's other gift – fame – that really made him such an important opponent for Crawford. Headlining at MSG in a PPV was a massive step in the Nebraskan's career, and the moment was masterfully constructed for him to shine.

Crawford, who was defending his WBO title, started out in an orthodox stance to match Khan's and seemed to be doing nothing in the first round (download in progress ...) until the challenger threw a jab and Crawford countered with a short, chopping right followed by a left hook. Khan's legs folded up like a collapsible chair and he went down. Not much to it. But if you thought that was anticlimactic, just wait ...

For the time being, the action started to improve. Khan made it out of the first round and actually started to box his way back into the fight, using some semblance of his old quickness and a rapid-fire jab as Crawford focused almost entirely on countering with a one-hitter quitter. Being in that situation, Khan should be given credit for continuing to push the action – Crawford's power/reflex combination was obviously capable of knocking him out, but with the titleholder content to wait, Khan was basically forced to participate in his own execution, which is both interesting and really messed up.

In the third, Crawford switched to southpaw and continued to wait, but in the fourth he decided to try something else. He unpacked a variety of punches, a lot of them aimed at Khan's body, and threw everything hard. He tagged Khan from long range, then stepped outside his left foot and closed in to do more damage. The challenger fought back, chugging forward with alternating straight punches and a good counter here and there, but he was also getting busted up – visibly on his face and presumably the same in parts unseen. Which brings us to Round 6 ...

Somewhere in the middle of an exchange, Crawford threw a left hook that landed below Khan's belt and somewhere in the region of his right testicle. The exact geography was shrouded, but Khan insisted that he'd been punched in the nuts and was experiencing debilitating pain. He didn't want the five-minute recovery allowed by the rules; he wanted to stop, according to trainer Virgil Hunter, who informed referee David Fields that they were done. So that was it. TKO for Crawford. Do we know who's No. 1 pound-for-pound now?

Khan tried to make his case as the crowd booed, but it didn't really matter. There wasn't going to be a rematch, and nobody can prove what was situated where when Crawford (35-0, 26 KOs) put glove to crotch. Mostly there was just the feeling that he was winning and Khan had bailed when he had the chance.

So Crawford did what he was supposed to do, and all the work he did above the beltline looked great. We don't really know anything new about pound-for-pound or welterweight rankings, though. We'll need to see Bud face Spence for that.

WORLD BEAT

Anthony Crolla was no match for Vasiliy Lomachenko. Can countryman Luke Campbell present a better challenge?

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

Three-weight world champion Vasiliy Lomachenko told me an hour after ruining Anthony Crolla inside four rounds at the Staples Center that Luke Campbell, in his view, is the toughest assignment in the lightweight division. Tougher than Teofimo Lopez or Mikey Garcia. If Garcia against Lomachenko does not happen, promoter Bob Arum told me, the world will get to see Lomachenko in London against Campbell.

"We are both Olympic champions from London 2012, and it would be a great fight. I love the noise the British fans make and how much they love boxing," said Lomachenko, who was mobbed in Liverpool when he attended Ukrainian compatriot Aleksandr Usyk's cruiserweight world title defense against Tony Bellew late last year. I learned that Lomachenko's promotional company, Top Rank, has already spoken to the O2 Arena to check out available dates there.

Lomachenko defended his Ring, WBA and WBO lightweight belts with a brutal stoppage of Crolla 58 seconds into Round 4. Lomachenko (13-1, 10 KOs) brutalized the WBA's mandatory challenger throughout their fight, nearly ending it late in the third round when the Ukrainian star knocked the British fighter into the ropes. Referee Jack Reiss allowed the fight to continue, and Lomachenko finished after the break with a right hand that dropped Crolla face-first onto the canvas.

"I've been doing this for well over 50 years, and I've never seen anything like that guy," said Bob Arum, Lomachenko's Hall of Fame promoter. "He's almost breathtaking."

"I loved fighting at the Olympics in London, and it is a great place for boxers, because the fans understand and love the sport," added Lomachenko. "I want Mikey Garcia. I want to unify titles. That's my goal. I want historic fights."

Promoter Arum told me later: "Vasiliy sees Campbell as the number-one challenge in the lightweight division, because he follows what his father believes. Anatoly reckons that Campbell is the most technically gifted fighter in the division outside his son. I did not believe fighting Campbell is a gamble, but it would be a tremendous fight. Taking Lomachenko to the U.K. would be brilliant, as he is worthy of being a global star."

★★★

Disgraced heavyweight Kash Ali was suspended for six months and fined £10,000 (exactly half of his fight purse) for biting David Price during a non-title fight in Liverpool. Price, who described his rival afterward as "an animal," was left with teeth marks on his stomach after the shocking incident in the fifth round.

Price also alleged that the 27-year-old Ali had bitten him at least twice in the opening two rounds, though it apparently went unnoticed by referee Mark Lyson, who had no hesitation in pulling Ali off of Price in the fifth and disqualifying him.

The British Boxing Board of Control immediately summoned the Birmingham boxer to appear before his local Central Area Council, where punishment was handed down on April 22. Robert Smith, the secretary of the BBBofC, who attended the fight, told me: "It's disgusting, abhorrent what Ali did, and there is no place for this in boxing. It's totally unacceptable."

"I don't want to share a ring with an animal like that again," said Price when asked if he would consider a rematch with Ali, who had gone into the bout having won all 15 of his previous professional fights.

In 2009, heavyweight Dereck Chisora took a page from Mike Tyson's book and bit Paul Butlin's ear in a clinch. Chisora did not take a piece of Butlin's ear or even cause him to bleed the way Tyson infamously did to Evander Holyfield, and the fight was allowed to continue, with Chisora winning by decision. He was fined £2,500 and was suspended for four months.

★★★

Flyweight titleholder Charlie Edwards dominated Angel Moreno to retain the WBC belt at the Copper Box in East London in March, dedicating his first world title defense to his ailing mother, Terry.

If the victory over Cristofer Rosales to claim the belt on December 22 last year was an emotional night on an amazing journey for mother and son, this triumph on Saturday night was one of jubilation.

Against Rosales, Edwards was spiteful and clinical. In this performance against Moreno, out came the artist, the dancer, the consummate boxer in Edwards, whose dominance over the Spaniard was so complete that he was a landslide winner by 120-107 on the cards of all three ringside judges.

★★★

Katie Taylor added the WBO lightweight belt to her IBF and WBA titles on March 15 in Philadelphia with a ninth-round stoppage of previously unbeaten Brazilian Rose Volante. After another authoritative victory, Taylor is one triumph away from her 2019 goal of unifying the women's 135-pound division.

Indeed, the 2012 Olympic Games gold medalist moved with alacrity in calling out Belgium's Delfine Persoon, the former kickboxer who holds the WBC's bauble. That matchup, which will also award The Ring's inaugural women's lightweight championship, was confirmed in mid-April and will take place on June 1 at Madison Square Garden. Beyond that lies a potential fight against seven-division titleholder Amanda Serrano or even moving up 12 pounds to face welterweight Cecilia Braekhus, though the pound-for-pound queen has also been called out by newly crowned Ring women's middleweight champ Claressa Shields.

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The London Telegraph.

Katie Taylor added a third lightweight title to her collection with a ninth-round stoppage of Rose Volante on March 15 in Philadelphia.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

For Brian Viloria, it wasn't so much what he felt as what he didn't feel that let him know it was over. For the last few trips between the ropes, that nervous feeling that kept him on high alert had been absent. It's understandable, considering he'd won world titles at two weights, including the rare unification at flyweight, and had represented the U.S. at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. At a certain point, a fighter becomes immune to the adrenaline.

"I was sitting in the locker room and usually I would have butterflies – I would have jitters and my heart rate would just be spiked up – but for some reason I just felt calm. I'm not sure it was a good thing, but looking at it in hindsight, the excitement was gone," said Viloria, now 38.

After his last fight, a decision loss to Artem Dalakian in February 2018, he told his wife, Erica, that he'd had enough of fighting. "The Hawaiian Punch," who'd been the first fighter to unify at flyweight since the 1960s, had given some thought to his life after boxing. He'd gotten a mass communications degree while at Northern Michigan University and considered going into broadcasting someday. And then there was the business world, but the idea of sitting in a cubicle all day scared Viloria in ways that facing a prime Chocolatito Gonzalez never could.

Viloria still had a passion for boxing, but on the teaching side. He'd dabbled a bit when he was still fighting and would drop by the IMB Academy run by his uncle Richard Bustillo, who taught Jeet Kune Do to Bruce Lee's children, to teach a few boxing classes. After deciding his fighting days were done, Viloria discussed the idea of opening his own gym with Marvin Somodio, who had trained him for the last few years. Instead, they took jobs training clients and boxers at Wild Card West, now known as Churchill Boxing Club.

Viloria brought the experience of having trained under some of the best boxing minds of his time – Freddie Roach, Robert Garcia and Joe Goossen – and had worked out alongside Manny Pacquiao and Mikey Garcia. Oh, and he also can skip rope pretty well.

"I've heard it for a while: 'You're the jump rope guy.' I go, 'I box, too'; they go, 'Really?'"

When Somodio had to return to the Philippines, he left Raymundo Beltran in Viloria's care; the former lightweight titleholder was in a must-win situation after losing to Jose Pedraza and needed a big victory against Hiroki Okada on February 10. Beltran delivered just that, winning by ninth-round KO against the unbeaten Japanese fighter. Viloria has also taken on Chris van Heerden, helping to reinvent the South African fringe contender into more of a boxer than a slugger in his technical-decision win over Mahonri Montes on March 23.

The nervous feeling has returned – "tenfold" – now that Viloria is in the corner giving advice and not controlling the action himself. It kicked in big time the day after van Heerden's fight when Viloria worked Christian Robles' third pro fight against Jesus Godinez. Robles was knocked down in Round 2, and though Viloria was sweating bullets inside, he had to keep a cool demeanor and explain to Robles how to proceed from that point. Robles came back to win a decision.

Less than a year since he first put a "for hire" sign out for potential boxers to train, Viloria says he now

Recently retired two-division titleholder Brian Viloria is settling into his new role as a trainer.

TOM JENKINS

has to pick and choose who he works with because he's getting so many calls. And these fighters want to learn more than fancy rope-skipping.

"I've tasted how it was to win a title, I've tasted how it was to lose a title, so I've gone through that whole drama. My career was just a huge roller coaster. I fought in Alameda Swap Meet and I've also fought at Madison Square Garden, so I got to feel and be a part of every little thing in the sport. That experience could help with the fighters."

★★★

MAGSAYO RETURNS WITH KO WIN

It's understandable that Mark Magsayo was a bit impatient after 17 months out of the ring. For the first six minutes against Erick Deztroyer in Singapore, Magsayo swung for the fences, trying to put the Indonesian on his back. Many of those shots missed, but by the third round, he settled down and the offense came more naturally.

"First I can't get my rhythm because I am excited to punch my opponent and get back in the ring," said Magsayo, whose international profile had been helped by a pair of wins at the then-StubHub Center in California: a first-round knockout of Yardley Cruz in 2015 and a unanimous decision over Ramiro Robles in 2016. Against Deztroyer in the fourth round, a three-punch combo punctuated by a hook put the Indonesian down for the count, raising Magsayo's record to 19-0 (14 KOs). Magsayo has had to put behind him several out-of-the-ring distractions, including a split from ALA Promotions and the disappointment of a prolonged training camp in Las Vegas without a fight. For this fight, Magsayo trained with Rissan Muelas at an Elorde Gym location in Manila. Now he feels he's ready for whomever manager Vikram Sivapragasam and promoter Cameron Dunkin can line up for him at featherweight.

"Whatever fight they give me, I'll take," said Magsayo.

Ryan Songalia is based in New York City and can be reached at ryansongalia@gmail.com.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

Junior lightweight titleholder Masayuki Ito arrived in Los Angeles on April 10 to begin the U.S. portion of his training camp for Jamel Herring under the guidance of head coach Rudy Hernandez and assistant trainer Daisuke Okabe. They had six weeks to prepare for the second defense of Ito's WBO belt against the 2012 U.S. Olympian and former Marine on May 25 in Kissimmee, Florida.

"Of course I miss my family in Japan, and I may feel homesick on many occasions while I maintain myself mentally and physically, but I have to be here to do what I can only do here with my team," Ito told The Ring.

It was almost four years ago, just before Ito suffered his first loss to Rikki Naito for the Japanese title in early 2015, when he got an opportunity to train with Hernandez and Okabe. Without any amateur experience, the ex-basketball player used his natural sense and athletic ability to counterpunch to get the attention of boxing people, but he needed to further his skills to fight at the world level. He got it from Rudy and Daisuke. They taught the boxing latecomer how to fight on the inside and utilize combinations. The team's hard work in the gym came to fruition when Ito faced Christopher Diaz for the vacant WBO title last July in Kissimmee. That fight was the perfect storm of the coaches' tactics and the fighter's ability to put them into practice, which made history when Ito became the first Japanese boxer to capture a world title in America in 37 years.

Ito returns to Kissimmee for his toughest pro challenge against the tall American southpaw. The fight site is near a military base, which

Masayuki Ito will return to Kissimmee, Florida, where he won his 130-pound title, to defend the WBO belt against skilled Jamel Herring.

might make Herring the crowd favorite, but that doesn't really matter to Ito.

"I don't mind being booed; I even like it, because I know American people will cheer for me if I do a good job," he said. "I felt the same when I fought Diaz as an underdog. This time, I am an 'A-side' fighter. So I feel better. But still, I like to fight away from home."

Ito recently signed a co-promotional deal with Top Rank (which was announced at Staples Center in Los Angeles after the Vasiliy Lomachenko-Anthony Crolla lightweight championship). The partnership between Ito's Japanese promoter, Teiken Boxing, and Top Rank will ensure that Ito's fights are broadcast on ESPN in the U.S.

"This is what I have dreamed of," Ito said. "I wanted to be promoted in a big, global promotion. And I want to be recognized and popular in the world. This is a very important fight – the first step to be like that. Herring has a great career and style, so this fight is not going to be easy, for sure. But I have to make it a great fight to get credit."

Ito started sparring while still at the Teiken Gym in Tokyo, but he is going to have much harder sessions in L.A. while building the strategy for Herring with his coaches.

"I love to work with Rudy and Daisuke," he said. "They give me detailed techniques to deal with any opponents. I just try it and learn. Even if Herring is tall and long-armed with a small face, which is a (difficult) target, I don't really care. I just do what I have to do to win."

Hernandez is an old-school coach, so he's happy Ito feels that way.

"We're training to fight a southpaw, but if there's no southpaw (to spar with), we will work regardless. Once he gets how to fight a southpaw, we won't need southpaws, just a sparring partner to stay sharp. Ito is talented and smart. He knows how to adjust and do things naturally."

The team is determined and confident to do what's necessary for victory on May 25 and looks forward to bigger fights for bigger money.

"I want to be a big deal in America," Ito said, "and I don't mind taking risks to go get the KO victory to be a star here."

Yuriko Miyata has covered the Japanese boxing scene for more than 20 years.

Ito is learning a Mexican/L.A. style of boxing from trainer Rudy Hernandez, as evidenced by his body attack against Evgeny Chuprakov.

TOM JENKINS

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

There are certain assumptions in boxing. If you are talking about the South African scene, one of them is that a fighter hailing from the Eastern Cape region carries a certain street cred. They breed them tough down there – the burgeoning collection of world title belts testifies to that.

Then there is some general wisdom. For instance, the Mayweather "Philly shell" defense is not for everyone; you'd best leave that alone – just ask Andre Berto. Planting yourself in a corner when fighting your typical Mexican pressure fighter is also something that is frowned upon.

The assumption certainly applied to Azinga "Golden Boy" Fuzile as he ducked through the ropes at Nangoza Jebe Hall in Port Elizabeth to take on former world title challenger Romulo Koasicha in a 12-round junior lightweight bout on April 7. Fuzile is as hot a prospect as there has been in years, and his partisan fans expect him to go all the way. None of that pressure seemed to faze him on the day.

A slick southpaw who fights in a sideways stance vaguely reminiscent of former middleweight champ Sergio Martinez, Fuzile took control

from the first round. A hard left uppercut followed by a right hook to the body served notice that he meant business. Following a time out for a Fuzile blow that strayed south of the border, the visitor was soon dropped by a left uppercut.

What happened in the following rounds was the surprising bit. Fuzile planted himself in the corner, covered up tightly and let Koasicha try to pummel him. He was amazingly effective in neutralizing the Mexican's offense and then answering with his own blistering combinations, backing Koasicha off and sliding along the ropes while potshotting his opponent whenever he came into range.

Koasicha's only stoppage loss came in 2015 at the hands of Vasiliy Lomachenko, who eventually got him out of there in the 10th via a series of body shots. Fuzile no doubt had that in mind when he administered a rib-roasting in the seventh stanza, but somehow Koasicha survived.

Koasicha had a flicker of success in the 11th when Fuzile decided to coast and stick-and-move the last two rounds, but the decision was never in any doubt. Fuzile moves to 14-0 (8 KOs) while the extremely tough and game Koasicha drops to 27-8.

Next up is an IBF eliminator. Hopefully another win will lead to a mandatory shot at Tevin Farmer's title.

★★★

At press time, WBO bantamweight titleholder Zolani Tete was preparing to step into the ring against WBA counterpart and future Hall of Famer Nonito Donaire at the Cajundome in Louisiana, looking to add to his stature in the annals of South African boxing. Tete is only the second South African attempting to unify two major titles (Brian Mitchell fought Tony Lopez to a draw in a 1991 IBF/WBA unification bout), and if he wins, he will not only join Hekkie Budler as the only South Africans to hold two major belts (Budler won the Ring championship and two titles in a single fight against Ryoichi Taguchi last year), he will also beat the Donaire jinx on South African fighters.

The Filipino Flash has vanquished no fewer than three incumbent or eventual titleholders from South Africa in his career, starting with current IBF flyweight boss Moruti Mthalane. He took the IBF junior featherweight title from Jeffrey Mathebula as well as the WBA featherweight strap from Simphiwe Vetyeka.

Vetyeka's former manager, Andile "Ace" Sidinile, knows what it is to be in the opposite corner against Donaire. At the time of this writing, he was on his way stateside to join Team Tete in an advisory capacity, so I gave him a call. Tete will be trained by veteran Loyiso Mtya, who will be assisted by Floyd Mayweather Sr. The plan is to finish the camp off in Las Vegas and then move to Louisiana the week of the fight. I asked Sidinile for a prediction. "Zolani will win a unanimous decision in a tough, bruising fight. This is one of his toughest fights, and we are preparing him well. Donaire is one of the greats. The difference is it is Zolani's time. Donaire's time has passed."

Ace told me to call Tete's manager, Mlandeli Tengimfene, who was even more optimistic. He dismissed any rumors of weight trouble, with Tete being a very rangy bantamweight. "He is very comfortable at the weight," said Tengimfene. Prediction? "Round 7, he is gone."

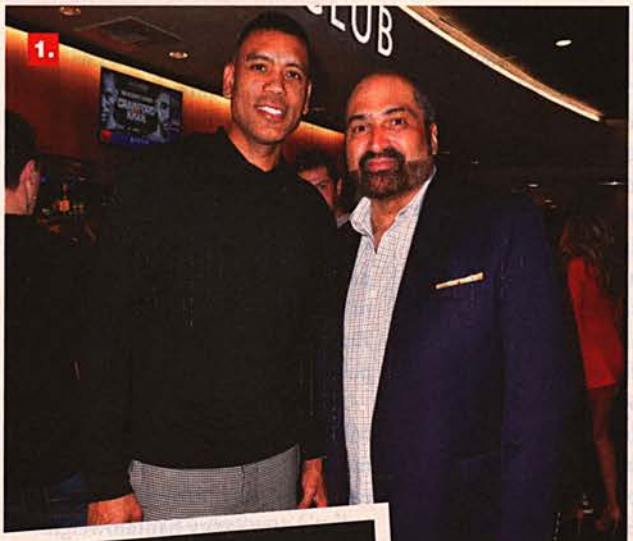
"Really?"

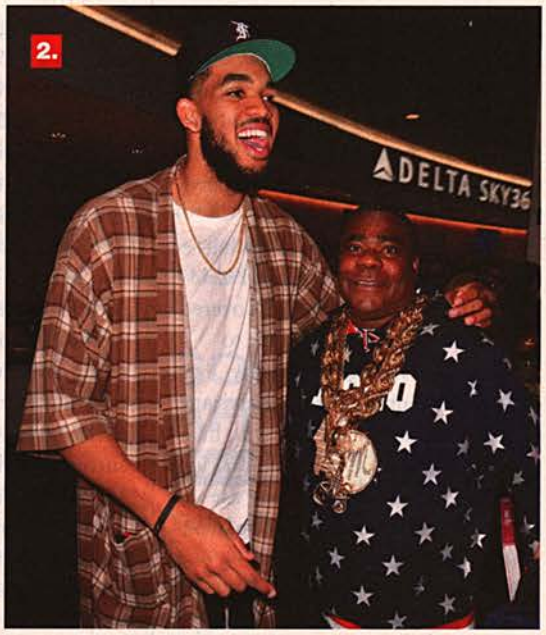
"You wait and see," he laughed. RING

Droeks Malan is the South African correspondent for The Ring. You can reach him via Twitter @droeksonboxing and read his blogs on couchpotatofightguru.blogspot.com.

Zolani Tete was set to take part in one of the most significant fights in recent South African history against Nonito Donaire on April 27.

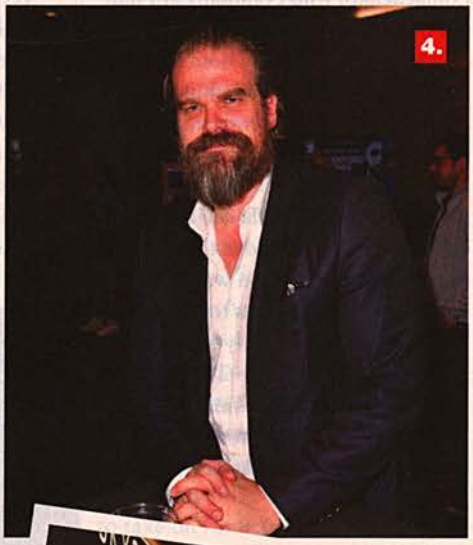
NIETES: PHILIP FONG

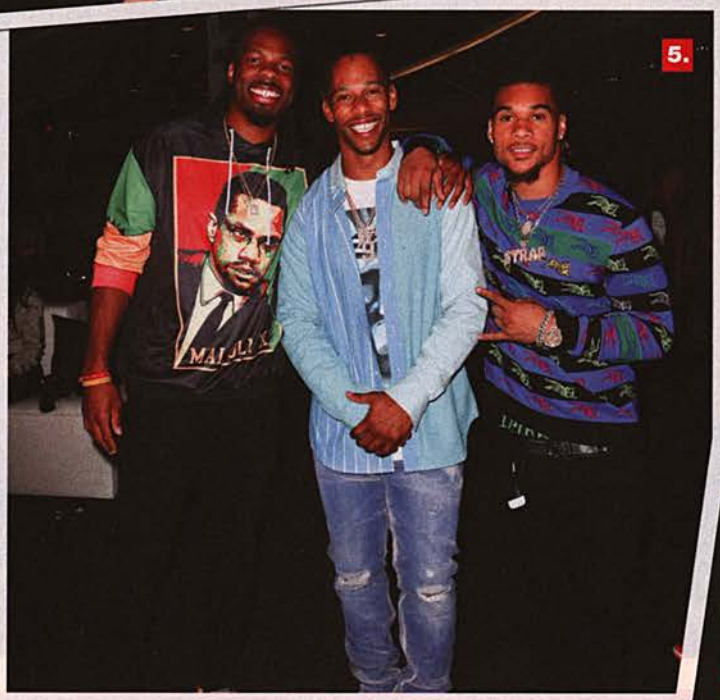




STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

Celebrities attend Terence Crawford vs. Amir Khan. NEW YORK, NY - APRIL 20: 1. Allan Houston and Franco Harris 2. Karl-Anthony Towns Jr. and Tracy Morgan 3. Rosie Perez 4. David Harbour 5. Kevin White, Victor Cruz and Cre'Von LeBlanc 6. Remy Ma





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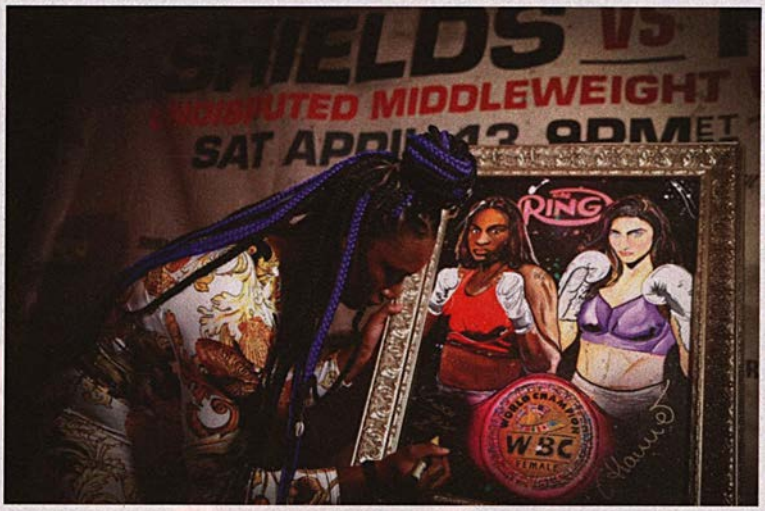

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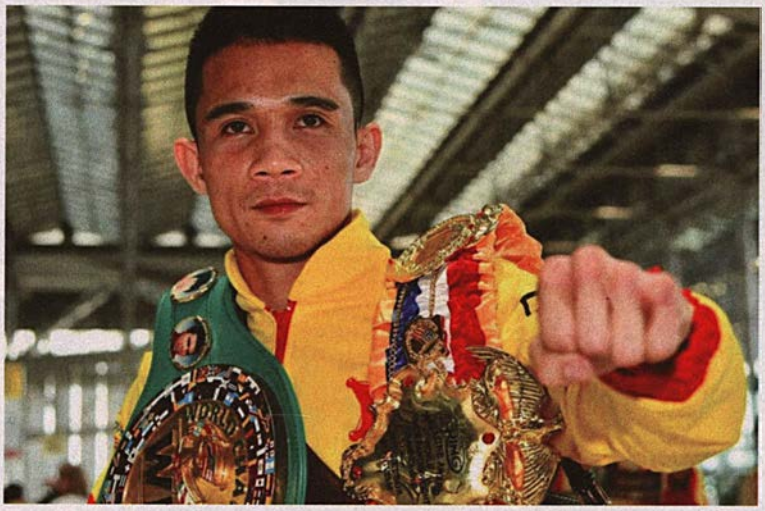

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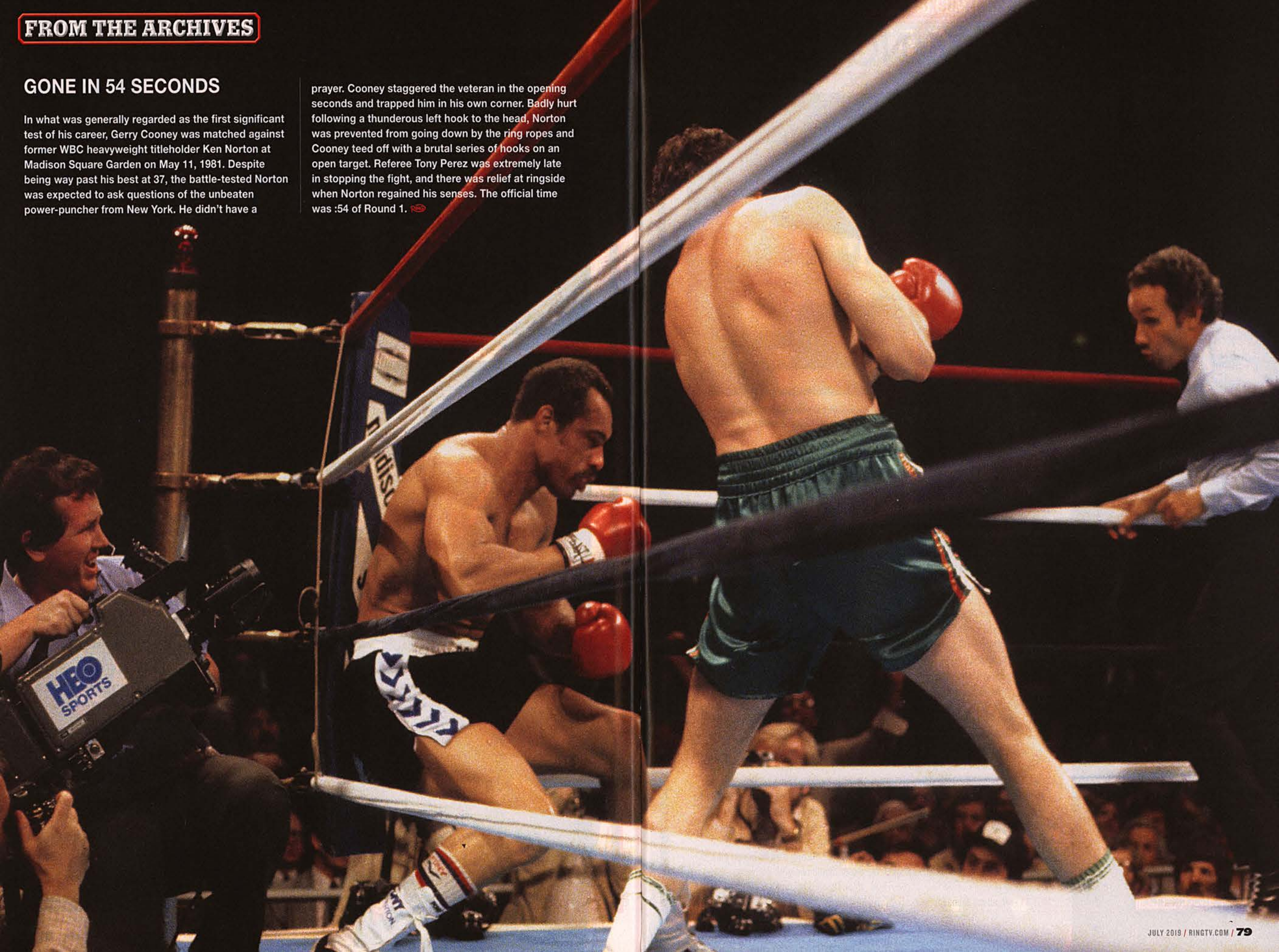
GONE IN 54 SECONDS

In what was generally regarded as the first significant test of his career, Gerry Cooney was matched against former WBC heavyweight titleholder Ken Norton at Madison Square Garden on May 11, 1981. Despite being way past his best at 37, the battle-tested Norton was expected to ask questions of the unbeaten power-puncher from New York. He didn't have a prayer. Cooney staggered the veteran in the opening seconds and trapped him in his own corner. Badly hurt following a thunderous left hook to the head, Norton was prevented from going down by the ring ropes and Cooney teed off with a brutal series of hooks on an open target. Referee Tony Perez was extremely late in stopping the fight, and there was relief at ringside when Norton regained his senses. The official time was :54 of Round 1.



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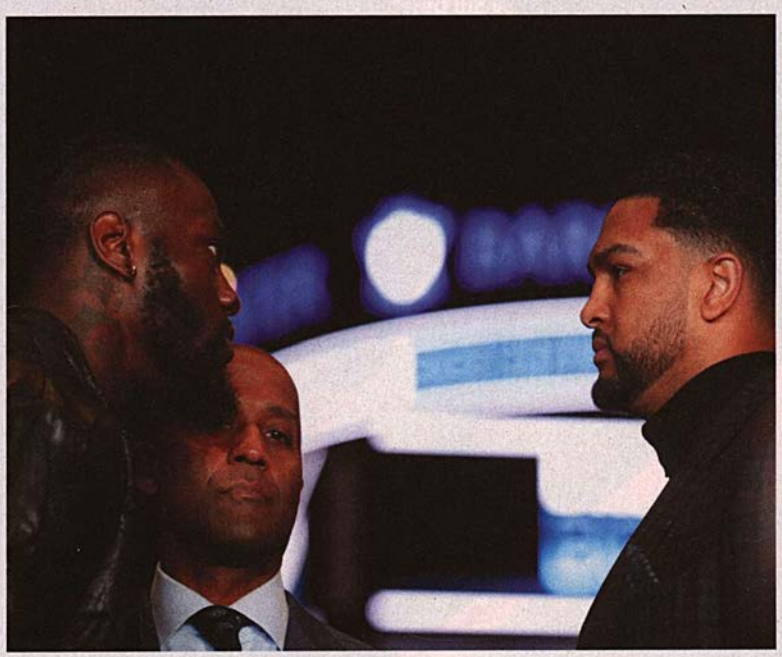

There's no love lost between WBC heavyweight titleholder Deontay Wilder and challenger Dominic Breazeale. The big men share a nasty history that will be settled in the ring on May 18.

MAY

MAY 18 – Emmanuel Rodriguez vs. Naoya Inoue, bantamweights (WBSS semifinal, for Rodriguez's IBF title), Glasgow, Scotland (DAZN). Also, Ivan Baranchyk vs. Josh Taylor, junior welterweights (for Baranchyk's IBF title).
MAY 18 – Deontay Wilder vs. Dominic Breazeale, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), Brooklyn, N.Y. (Showtime). Also, Gary Russell Jr. vs. Kiko Martinez, featherweights (for Russell's WBC title).
MAY 18 – Billy Joe Saunders vs. Shefat Isufi, middleweights, London (BT Sport).
MAY 18 – Felix Alvarado vs. Reiya Konishi, junior flyweights (for Alvarado's IBF title), Kobe, Japan.
MAY 25 – Aleksandr Usyk vs. Carlos Takam, heavyweights, Oxon Hill, Maryland (DAZN, Sky Sports).
MAY 25 – Masayuki Ito vs. Jamel Herring, junior lightweights (for Ito's WBO title), Kissimmee, Florida (ESPN).
MAY 25 – Austin Trout vs. Terrell Gausha, junior middleweights, Biloxi, Mississippi (Fox Sports 1).
MAY 31 – Wanheng Menayothin vs. Tatsuya Fukuhara, strawweights (for Menayothin's WBC title), Chonburi, Thailand.

JUNE

JUNE 1 – Anthony Joshua vs. TBA, heavyweights (for Joshua's IBF, WBA and WBO titles), New York (DAZN). Also, Katie Taylor vs. Delfine Persoon, lightweights (for Taylor's IBF/WBA/WBO, Persoon's WBC titles and vacant Ring championship).
JUNE 8 – Gennady Golovkin vs. Steve Rolls, super middleweights, New York (DAZN).
JUNE 15 – Mairis Briedis vs. Krzysztof Glowacki, cruiserweights, Riga, Latvia (DAZN). Also, Yunier Dorticos vs. Andrew Tabiti, cruiserweights.
JUNE 15 – Josh Warrington vs. Kid Galahad, featherweights (for Warrington's IBF title), Leeds, U.K. (ESPN+, BT Sport).
JUNE 15 – Tyson Fury vs. Tom Schwarz, heavyweights, Las Vegas (ESPN+).
JUNE 19 – Kazuto Ioka vs. Aston Palicte, junior bantamweights (for vacant WBO title), Chiba City, Japan.

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